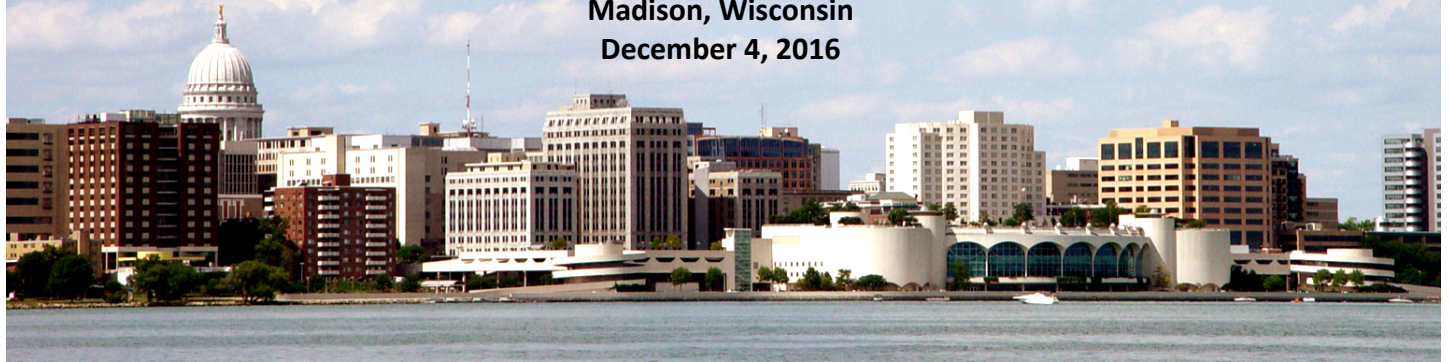


Love One Another

1 JOHN 2:7-11; 3:11-24; 4:20-21

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Over the past several weeks, we have been looking together at the book of 1 John, and we have learned that John (as the last living apostle) is fighting back against a rather unusual false teaching that was starting to make its way into the Lord's church in the late early 90's of the First Century. And as one of the last people alive at that time to have actually known the Lord personally, John was in a unique position to combat a number of lies that were going around at that time. One of those ideas was that Jesus was not really God in the flesh, and the other idea was that what we do with our bodies has no effect on us spiritually. So, over the past few weeks, we have looked at John's response to those two ideas.

Unfortunately, though, those false ideas were already starting to wreak havoc on the early church. As many of you know (some of us from personal experience), when false ideas start making their way into the church, relationships suffer, and sometimes it is easy to get distracted and to lose sight of what we really need to be doing. And so for this reason, John, after forcefully refuting these various false ideas, he comes back with a huge emphasis on LOVE. And so this morning, as we move forward in our studies from 1 John, I'd like for us to combine a number of passages where the main idea is that we need to LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

Love, and especially, this idea that we need to love one another, can be a challenge from time to time. And I say this, knowing that some of us are not always "loveable." And yet at the same time, loving each other is one of the most basic and one of the most important things we can do as God's people. Sometimes we hurt each other, sometimes we forget to actually do what we need to be doing, sometimes we get on each other's nerves. And I say this with reference to us as a congregation. Yes, we need to love our families, yes, we need to love our children, yes, we need to love people in the world around us, but the emphasis in 1 John seems to be on loving each other, on loving each other in the church. And even before we look together at the actual passages, I would point out here at the beginning that John uses the word AGAPE. Apparently, the Greek language has a number of words that are sometimes translated into English as "love" – family love, friendship, romantic love, and so on, but the word AGAPE is rather unique, in that it refers more to "sacrificial love," to the kind of love that does what is best for the other person, regardless of the cost to us personally. So I want us to keep this in mind as we look at these passages. We aren't talking about a warm feeling toward somebody, we aren't talking about anything romantic, we aren't talking necessarily about the kind of love we have toward a good friend, we aren't even talking about saying, "I love you," or hugging somebody, but the love we read about here is a decision to do what is best for another person.

So, with this as background, I'd like for us to look at these three passages, and then I'd like to go back and make several observations based on what we've read from the word of God. First of all, though, notice, please, 1 John 2:7-11,

⁷ Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. ⁸ On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. ⁹ The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. ¹⁰ The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Then, we bring in another passage from 1 John 3:11-24,

¹¹ For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; ¹² not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

¹³ Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶ We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. ¹⁹ We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him ²⁰ in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

²³ This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. ²⁴ The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

And for the final passage on this love we need to have for each other, let's also notice 1 John 4:20-21,

²⁰ If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

I know we have looked at a lot of information here, but as we try to condense it down into something we can take away with us this morning, I want us to come away with three basic ideas.

- I. **And the first idea comes across right away back in chapter 2, where John reminds us that this command to love each other is nothing new – in fact, THE COMMAND TO LOVE IS A VERY, VERY OLD COMMANDMENT – in fact, it is a commandment going all the way back to the beginning.**

Now remember: John is confronting some people who were claiming that they had some new information from God, something new and exciting. They had this super secret special information, late-breaking news from heaven. And John is basically saying here: No! If you really want to know what God wants, go back, go way back, and the command is (and always has been), ***“Love one another.”***

And as he points out, loving others has always been a challenge, almost from the very beginning of time. And to help prove this, he brings up (in Chapter 3) the example of Cain and Abel. Cain murdered his brother! If there was ever an example of a lack of a lack of love, we see it in Cain’s attitude toward his brother Abel. And it’s interesting to me why John brings up this particular example from the Old Testament. Why did Cain hate Abel? Think about the normal reasons brothers and sisters might get into it. My sister and I once got into a fight because she had the audacity to take a box of Wheat Thins to her bedroom – not only that, but she finished the box! But that’s not what Cain killed Abel over, is it? It wasn’t that one stole the other’s girlfriend. It wasn’t because one took up too much room in the bedroom. It wasn’t a business deal gone bad. It wasn’t because one borrowed a tool and didn’t return it. But instead, Cain killed Abel, according to 1 John 3:12, ***“...because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous.”*** I don’t think I’ve missed anything here when I point out that this seems to be a murder that takes place over a RELIGIOUS DISPUTE! Abel’s sacrifice was pleasing to God, but Cain’s was not. Of course, Cain takes it to an extreme here – he murders his brother. But it all goes back to a lack of love, doesn’t it? Cain did not love his brother. Sometimes that lack of love expresses itself in murder, but sometimes it shows itself when we ignore somebody, when we try to avoid somebody, when we gossip behind somebody’s back, when we behave in a cold way toward somebody, and on and on. From the beginning, people have had a hard time getting along, and so John points out that the command to love each other goes all the way back. It is a great, old commandment.

Some people might think that love is really only mentioned in the New Testament, but that is not the case. In Leviticus 19:18, God said, ***“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.”*** And then, of course, when someone asked Jesus to give his opinion concerning the greatest commandment in the Law of Moses, Jesus explained that the greatest commandment is that we are to ***“love God,”*** but then he said (in Mark 12:31), ***“The second [greatest commandment] is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*** It is important, then, that we love each other, and this commandment goes all the way back.

The reminder, then (as we get into this passage) is: Do not be like Cain! Do not allow the spirit of Cain to make its way into the church. Do not foster this hatred toward one another. Do not let issues go unresolved. I think of Paul’s warning to the churches of Galatia, ***“But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another”*** (Galatians 5:15). Do not give in to this old, evil attitude; but instead, love one another – obey this command that goes back to the beginning.

- II. **There is a second idea we need to get out of this passage, and it comes as John gives us the example of Jesus, and the idea is: If you want to know what it looks like to love one another, look to Jesus! JESUS IS THE PERFECT EXAMPLE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO LOVE!**

We don't need to look up the word "love" in a dictionary – we need to look at Jesus, we need to study his life, we need to look at how he lived. John 3:16 is one of the most famous verses in the Bible, ***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*** And that's great, but 1 John 3:16 is also great. Notice, please, 1 John 3:16, ***“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”*** So again, if we want to know what it means to love each other, we look to Jesus – we know love when we know that Jesus laid down his life for us. His life wasn't taken from him, but he laid it down – he gave it. ***“For God so love the world, that he GAVE his only Son.”***

Jesus gave an entirely new depth of meaning to that great old command that we are to love one another. Jesus showed us how it's done. We know there is a huge difference between studying something and actually seeing it demonstrated. I think of the conflict we've seen between our architect and the concrete contractor. The concrete guy has actually been building stuff out of concrete for 25 years. The architect, though, has read a book about concrete. They both know something about concrete. The book knowledge is useful, but the concrete guy has actually done it. We think of the value of having an internship or an apprenticeship. Again, there is a difference between studying something and actually doing it. Jesus has actually done it. Jesus has demonstrated what it means to love, and he did that by laying down his life for us.

Remember our original definition of AGAPE love – choosing to do what is best for another person, with no regard for what it might cost me to do it, sacrificial love. Jesus loved us like that.

III. As we go back to 1 John and these “love one another” passages, there is something else we need to come away with this morning, and that is: This great, old commandment that has been demonstrated by Jesus is to be OBEYED BY EACH OF US.

We love each other in the church. We don't just tolerate each other. We love, not just when we feel like somebody has been nice to us. But we love, we sacrifice, we do what somebody needs to have done for them. As John says in 3:18, ***“Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”*** When we really love, we do what needs to be done.

Years ago, I remember Keola getting t-boned in an intersection down in Janesville while driving our only car. I was across town at the church building where one of our members just happened to have stopped by to make some copies. The paramedics called the church, she was worried how I would get over there, but this Christian brother dropped what he was doing and drove me to the scene of the accident. As I was getting in the back of the ambulance to check on my wife who was expecting at the time, this Christian brother gave me the keys to his van and he said, “It's yours until you figure something out,” and then (as I remember it) he walked away from the ambulance and back to his house. Johnny Mullins never once came up to me and said, “I love you,” as far as I know, he never hugged me, but he did what needed to be done.

I think of an older man at the church where I grew up. This man had a disabled son maybe 50 or so years old himself, the son was in a wheelchair, and he got around the house by scooting around on his rear end, crab-style. Well, as you can imagine, this man, scooting around the house, blew through blue jeans like they were nothing. So, some of the women of the church down there (including my mom) would take turns patching those pants – one patch on top of another, on top of another, on top of another. They were doing for him what needed to be done.

I hope we are seeing here that there is a difference between LIKING someone and LOVING someone. Liking someone is an emotion. I like people who are nice to me. I like people when we have something in common. But when we are talking about LOVE (according to these verses, at least), we are talking about a decision to do what is best for another person, even if they don't deserve it, even if I don't LIKE that person, even if that person has hurt me in the past. Love is a decision.

Have we thought about the fact that John is commanding us to love? You can't really command that someone like another person. But again, that is not what is happening here. In this passage, love is a choice. Sometimes, though, we might wonder: Well, how do I know what needs to be done? You know that I love cartoons. Sometimes cartoons are funny. Sometimes, though, cartoons are not. The cartoon on the front of the bulletin this morning falls in this second category. I took the bulletin to Keola to proofread last night, and she took one look at the cartoon on the front of the bulletin, and she said, "That is not funny." And it is not. And yet, does it not teach a lesson? Is there not truth in it? Remember: Love is doing what needs to be done. We might think: But those women didn't know. And yet, right there, all around them, were things that needed to be done! So we need to be constantly asking ourselves the question: If I were in this situation, what might be helpful to me? We call this the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), ***"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."***

You know that a few weeks ago I got to go see my sister out in Washington State. I went out there because her husband (my brother-in-law) is dying of lung cancer. It seems to be getting just a little bit worse every day. He's losing weight almost constantly. It's hard. And as I was out there, we talked about how the church out there is responding. And they have been great. In so many ways, they have been so encouraging to my sister and to Tracy. And I am thankful for that. Worshiping there was truly a highlight of my trip. As I was out there, though, I asked my sister: What have you learned through all of this that might help us reach out to help somebody in a similar situation? And she basically said that she has actually been keeping a mental list of ways that she absolutely will be helping others in the future. And we talked about that. A few days ago, I wrote and told her I was working on this lesson, and I asked for her input again. This is what she says she will do for others in the future:

- If I stop by the sick person's house and see his wife mowing the lawn, instead of saying, "Well, if there's anything I can do just let me know!" I would just go ahead and finish the lawn.
- I would call or text before stopping by.
- When I make dinner for my own family, I will make a little extra and drop it off, in a disposable container.
- I would call the person and say, "Hey, I'm going to the store. What do you need while I'm there?"
- I would offer to walk the dogs or take care of other common chores.
- I would ask myself, "What am I good at? How can I use my gifts to help this person?"
- Don't ask if you can visit and then never show up.
- If I stop by for a visit and see that the bathroom is a disaster, I will clean the bathroom.
- Bring old magazines for the sick person to read.
- Don't say, "God doesn't give you more than you can bear." The Bible does not say this.

I think of this list, and I see a lot of love there, don't you? Love is very specific. Love requires that we think about a situation. Love requires that we open our hearts, that we open our eyes. Love is a command to be obeyed by all of us. As John said in 3:17, ***"But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"*** The problem is: So often, we might

not see our brother in need. We might not see, because our eyes are not open. If I get home from work, eat dinner, watch TV for four hours, and then fall asleep, I might not see my brother in need. It seems, then, that we need to spend more time together. You need to know what I need, and I need to know what you need. We cannot know that about each other based on 30 seconds every week in the entryway back there.

My suggestion this morning would be to think about somebody in the congregation you'd like to get to know better, and then do it! Have that person over for dinner, meet for breakfast, make a phone call, but whatever we do, let's at least do something to love each other. C.S. Lewis once said that, "Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular." I like that! I cannot say that I am a loving person, if I don't actually love anybody, realizing that love is not a feeling, but love is DOING.

This great and very old commandment demonstrated by Jesus must now be obeyed by all of us.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on these three passages, we notice all through each of these passages that loving each other seems to be how God knows that we really love him. In fact, as John says in 4:20, "**...the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.**" Do we love God? If we do, then we will always be on the lookout for ways to actually do good for our Christian family. Just a few years after this letter was written, a non-Christian by the name of Lucian made an interesting observation about these people called Christians. He said, "It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator [JESUS] has put it into their heads that they are brethren." And that is what we believe today, that we are brothers and sisters, and as members of the same family, we take care of each other. We love each other.

We have heard the commandment. We have seen it in Jesus. We can obey it with God's help.

Be Jesus to somebody today!

This morning we would like to invite you to become a part of God's family. Jesus came to this earth, lived a perfect life, died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up from the dead three days later. To be born into his family, we must repent and be baptized. If you have any questions, let us know, but if you are ready to obey the good news about Jesus right now, you can come and talk with me right now as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: foullakeschurch@gmail.com