

Sermon for The Fourth Sunday of Easter

Date: April 25, 2021

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

First Reading: Acts 4:1–12

Epistle Reading: 1 John 3:16–24

Gospel Reading: John 10:11–18

Sermon Text: 1 John 3:16–24

Sermon Title: What is Love?



Hymns:

LSB 709 – The King of Love My Shepherd Is

LSB 683 – Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me

LSB 666 – O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Divine Service Prayer and Preaching

Songs:

I Love you Lord
Father I Adore you
By Our Love
Beulah Land

Liturgy:

Creative Worship

p. 260



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
KAUS 1480 AM Sun. 9:00am



Text: 1 John 3:16–24

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

NOTE: Copyright information.

Pronunciation for difficult words are contained in { }

© 2021 Pastor James Groleau.

Permission is granted to use these sermons for any non-profit purpose. I only ask that credit, as to their origination, be noted appropriately.

Grace, and peace to you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

“By this we know love.” Those words should make your ears perk up. Love is it what we all want? It's what we all need? As fleeting as it is here it is what we seek.

So what does the Bible say about finding love?

Believe it or not, in one way or another, everybody loves. Even the worst people in history loved. However, on our own, most of the time the object of our love is selfish. When we love something, it's generally because it brings us pleasure. When we hate something, it's generally because it is a threat to us, or it brings pain. The question is: is love that is self-motivated really love at all?

The apostle John writes in verses just before what we read:

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.¹

Cain loved, but the object of his love was himself. His brother received recognition from God, and out of jealousy and self-looking love, Cain murdered his brother. His love of self showed itself as hate toward Abel. The message that we heard from the beginning is that we should love one another... but we don't.

Another example of failed human love is in Jesus' description of the Temple authority of His day. Their true love was not directed to those God had given them to care for. Their love was directed toward themselves.

Jesus taught:

He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.²

Remember:

This is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.³

1 1 John 3:11–12
2 John 10:12–13
3 (1 John 3:11

...but we don't.

The Law proves over and over again that we are more like Cain, and the hired hands, than we would like to admit. If we're honest, what did selfish love do for Cain and the false teachers? It led Cain to a fear of God that saw no hope, and it led to his exile and rejection from others. Where did it lead the Temple authority? It led them to fear of God, without hope, and to self-imposed exile. Love of self really does no good for anyone. We need something other than the love of self.

The message of Easter shows us a different kind of love. It is a love that has "the other" as the object of its attention. It is a love that lays down one's life for the sake of the other. It is a love that is confident and unafraid because it lacks nothing. It is not motivated by fear of loss. It recognizes that it has received everything, and so it freely gives.

Contrasting self-love with the love that we learn from God, John writes:

By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us.⁴

This is amazing, if you really think about it. People tell us that we have to earn their respect. We understand that we have to earn a paycheck. When people tell us that they love us, it's often followed with "because..." and that word is usually followed by something we did. For example, "I love you because you are always there for me." Or, "I love you because you are such a good friend." It's not wrong, and when we hear words like that, we feel good that we brought something good to someone else's life.

Here John is not talking about a love that we have earned. The love God has made known is far different from any other love. The Bible says:

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak... Christ died for the ungodly... God shows is love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.⁵

That is love.

Jesus gives this love willingly. He says:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep... I am the good shepherd... I lay

4 1 John 3:16

5 Romans 5:5-6, 8, 10

down my life for the sheep... No one takes [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.⁶

Jesus laid down His life and took it up again for us. This is the message of Easter: “By this we know love.”⁷

We receive and know this love every time we gather around our Good Shepherd in Word and Sacrament. Jesus says:

Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you.
Take and Drink; this is My blood which is shed for you.

Jesus gives you His love. Here is where you receive it. His love, which was first “poured out on us richly” in our Holy Baptism,⁸ continues to be received by us in His Sacred Supper. Also, in Confession and Absolution, He reveals to us that His love has removed every sin. By His love, the guilt and shame is removed. All of this is made possible because He laid down His life for the sheep and took it up again. Lent and Easter get at the heart of how we know real love.

That is where I know love, and that is where I find the source of my love for others. It is because Jesus laid down His life for me so I have the ability to lay down my life for others.

John wrote

This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He has commanded us.⁹

As Lutherans, we have always understood that obedience to God’s commandments begins with the Father’s love for us in Jesus. Jesus unites us to Himself in Holy Baptism connects us with the greatest act of love all creation has ever known: Jesus’ death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sin.¹⁰ Even more, Jesus continues to grant us this same love in His Holy Supper. After receiving that Supper, we often pray:

We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through

6 John 10:11, 14, 15, 18

7 1 John 3:16

8 Titus 3:6

9 1 John 3:23

10 Romans 6:3–4

the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another.¹¹

You see, we understand that “we should love one another,” and in the prayer after the Lord’s Supper, we recognize that the source of our love for others and faith toward God begins with knowing Jesus’ love for us.

By this we know love, that he laid down His life for us.¹²

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**



11 LSB, p 166
12 1 John 3:16