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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
February 9, 2014
5th Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 18:1-10; John 6:26-35
Hymns: 2; 245; 399; 412 (248)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 John 4:7-17

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, the Savior of all the world, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Understanding Love as It Comes to Us from God.

We love in so many ways, however most love, as we think of it, is emotion based and its life depends upon an emotional response. There is the love between two friends in which there is a commonality shared that forms a bond that brings pleasure or comfort or strength to both individuals. When it is not reflexive, there can be no lasting friendship and that love fades. It often does fade as people move on in the world to live in different places, or secure different jobs, or pursue new interests.

There is also romantic love when two people are attracted to one another, and feel a strong emotional attachment to one another so that they desire to be with the other person, and build a life together, perhaps to marry, and start a family. This romantic love requires reciprocity, or it will fade and die, or it will be twisted into something that is negative in both lives.

There is the love between a parent and a child, in which the parent nurtures the child emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually. This love desires appreciation and respect, and can certainly be broken down by sin. However in a Christian's home it is richly blessed, as Christian parents seek to provide all the blessings the Lord would have bestowed upon the child in their care.

All of these different kinds of love involve us in a deep personal relationship first, and then the action follows as an expression of that emotion.

There is another love to which the world aspires, but doesn't quite get. The world may refer to it as altruism, or altruistic love. Christians often use the Greek word for it, "**Agape**." This love starts with compassion and extends kindness towards another who is in distress, with kindness toward another who may not even appreciate the kindness, much less reciprocate. It is this love

which God extends to us in perfection, only God loves perfectly. It is this love that led God to reach out to us in grace and mercy and send a Savior into the world. It is this Agape love from God that our text opens for us today that we might more fully comprehend its wonder and its power in our lives.

THEME: God's Love Revealed in Our Salvation.

For us this begins with that which we may think of as the most obvious truth of the gospel. --

I. God Loved Us and Sent His Son.

We are so wrong in thinking of this as an obvious truth. It is anything but obvious to the carnal nature of man. It is however the fundamental or foundational truth of the Christian faith.

1 John 4:9-10 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

God's love toward us is revealed at its brightest and boldest with this truth, that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world for our salvation from sin and death. Apart from this truth we are dead. We are **spiritually** dead in this life because of the lethal nature of sin. It is only because of Christ Jesus that we have spiritual life. And we have Jesus only because God had mercy upon us, and in the greatness of His love toward a fallen and corrupt and evil mankind, He sent a Savior into the world to bring us life. Paul states this wondrous result of God's love coming into the world in Ephesians chapter 2

Ephesians. 2:1 You He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins."

In Christ we have life. In Christ we have spiritual life and eternal life. We have abundant life through Jesus. The thing is it wasn't enough that Jesus simply come into the world and teach us the wisdom of God in His sermons and other lessons. That the world can sort of grasp. Indeed the world likes to speak of Jesus as a kind

and wise man, one who brought the philosophy of love into the world as no one else had before Him, or would after Him. The world heaps what it sees as high praise upon Jesus as a great philosopher who impacted world history with His teaching. Actually this isn't such high praise, for the world does not and cannot comprehend the true measure of God's love for us. That can only be seen in the cross, and understanding that it was the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ that was the propitiation for our sins. That means that His death was the satisfying payment for our sins, and **“not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world”** (1 John 2:2)! That is the true and whole revelation of God's love for us. **“While we were still sinners Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:8)!

The true wonder of love is not found in the fact that we love God who is good and wise and just and holy in all His ways, (which we fail to do as for we still love ourselves rather than God). The true wonder of love is that God loved us who rebelled against Him, and still sin much every day, and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. And yet God loved us! **God has instilled that precious gift of divine love in our hearts through faith in Christ Jesus.** The love of God has been comprehended in our hearts by faith. God's love is within us and flows from us and so John declares in our text:

1 John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

This also is a work of God. It is the work of God the Holy Spirit that God's love is within our hearts and is a living power within us, shaping our attitudes and actions toward others that we might mimic God's love – NO – it is something more wonderful than that!

II. God Makes His Love Complete in Us!

1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

We have here a fuller explanation of the significance of God's love being a present force within us. It is a testimony to the reality of God in this world, and not only the reality that God exists, but to the true nature of God. **God is love.** No one has seen God at any time, but we know God by the faith that we hold in our hearts. We know that love of God which has been given to us in Christ Jesus. Now, as we interact with others in the world, both with our fellow Christians and those who are still "of the world," we will act in love toward them just as God acted in love toward us. And in this God's love is revealed to others in the world.

Now remember how and to what God reacted toward us with love. It was **sin**, and not just a little sin, but a continuous enmity, a constant rebellion. God responded to that sin within us with saving and forgiving love. He sent His Son into the world that we might live through Him. Now we are alive in that love of God! So as we encounter sin in the world, as we are on the **receiving end** of that sin in the world, both from family and friends, from fellow Christian and those who despise the gospel, we will react with the love of God. We lovingly forgive others when they sin against us because God in love has forgiven us.

This is how God makes His love complete in us. This is how God uses us to reveal His love to the world that those who still walk in the darkness of sin and death may see in us the light of the glory of Christ. Seeing the love of God in us they may hear the Word of the Lord regarding Jesus and by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit come to that same wonder of faith and love that we know in our hearts.

What a blessing this is for us!

III. God's Love Gives Us Confidence in Faith.

As we walk through this life with the love of God active and alive within our hearts we find ourselves growing in grace and also in our love toward God. The blessing of a confident faith is presented to us in the closing verse of our text.

1 John 4:17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

It begins with the confidence that our sins are forgiven. We have this confidence because of the sure Word of God. The gospel works this confidence in our hearts also through the gift of the sacraments. We are assured again and again by our Lord that He has atoned for our sins, that our sins have been fully paid for. God Himself has declared **the world** to be justified. He has declared that **you personally** have absolutely no guilt or condemnation any longer. You have been redeemed and set free by the blood of Christ, and faith has laid hold of this gift of love.

Now that God has also made this love a living force in our hearts we have seen it in action. No, not perfectly, because we still struggle with the flesh in this life, but our love for the Lord is manifested by shunning sin, and kindness and love and forgiveness toward our fellow man. By this the reality of God's love being within us is made sure. We have confidence given to us from God that we are His children, and **“if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”** (Romans 8:17).

We hold this confidence now, but it is most precious that we possess this confidence for the Day of Judgment. We know that the Day is coming when we shall all stand before the Lord to give an account of our lives. We know what the Scriptures say. Those who have done good shall enter into life, and those who have done evil shall be turned away and sent to eternal death. The devil would condemn us. He would steal away any confidence that we might have of entering into heaven by reminding us of all our sins, and especially those shameful sins that we hope no one else knows about. But we know God knows! Then our own conscience would condemn us. Confidence for that day doesn't come from hoping that we have done enough good, or sacrificed enough in our lives to satisfy God. Deep down all men know that can never be, for we have sinned against the Lord. No, it is from God's Love that possess this confidence.

Romans 8:33-34 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

And –

1 John 3:20 “If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart.”

That love of God that led God to send His Son into the world to deliver us from sin and death; that love of God that lives in our hearts as force and living power, revealing through us the love of God to the world; that Love of God shall receive us into eternal life. **This is our confidence**, the confidence of faith in the love of God. This confidence is ours in Christ now and forever!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.