

Written Copy: 1 John 3:14-18 “How Can I Love That Brother?”

4th Sunday of Easter

Sunday, April 25th, 2021

Text: 1 John 3:14-18

¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever 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 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

The text's intent:

Move Christians to live out lives characterized by increasing displays of sacrificial love toward one another that comes from Jesus Himself. As He willingly gave His very life out of love for me, I am to willingly give what I have sacrificially for my brother to help with His need, not for personal gain, but even when it means loss for me, just as Jesus' love for me meant personal loss for Him. Lives characterized by a lack of sacrificial love for others are lacking in Jesus' love in their hearts and are therefore lacking in a faith relationship with Him. When we fall short in sharing this kind of love with our brothers, the Spirit points us to the forgiveness we have in Christ, and His promise in the Gospel assures us that we are in faith toward Him, despite what our heart may say. Because we are brokenhearted over our lack of sacrificial love we know that we are living in repentant faith where the Spirit, after pointing to this failure, points us to Christ through the Gospel. And we are moved to prayerfully ask that He work to grow in us the power of that love so it controls our lives more and more. By the love that Jesus shares from the cross we live to obey His commands to us, not to be saved, but according to the knowledge we have by faith that we are saved and loved deeply by Him. He commands us to live Him sacrificially and love our brothers with that same love. And as we grow in that love, we know that His Spirit is abiding and working in us.

Focus Statement:

Jesus gives to us His sacrificial and unconditional love by which He accomplished our salvation in His death and resurrection. Through our baptism and His gift of the Holy Spirit He engenders in us a new life of sacrificial love for Him and for one another. His Spirit works in us to point out the ways we fail in order that we repent and recommit to growing in His love, which only comes from Him by faith.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We all have things, traits, personality flaws that cause us to get on each other's nerves. We sometimes just look past these flaws and ignore them, but don't truly forgive them. We bury them until they build up to a point we stop ignoring and lash out. We forget that not only do we cause the same reaction in others, but with our Lord against whom we offend daily, refusing to love as He has commanded us.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Continue to work with the Spirit as He seeks to grow the power of Jesus' love in our life by showing us how we fail and moving us toward loving sacrificially and unconditionally. We are to prayerfully meditate on His Gospel Message and ask His help to live our that love with those around us, knowing when we fail, we are forgiven.

Subject Sentence: Christ's love in me moves me to love others.

Introduction

This is Good Shepherd Sunday, where there is the unifying theme of Jesus being our Shepherd and we, His Sheep. As we each sang earlier “I am Jesus’ little lamb, ever glad at heart I am”. That makes us, His Church, His sheepfold here on earth. And if you were to picture us as His sheep safely held in His sheepfold what image comes to mind? Is it a tender and inviting picture? Is it a gathering of well-behaved lambs, who are clean and white, always obeying their Shepherd’s voice, directions, and commands? They never jostle each other but always act with love, care, and respect for one another. That’s a very nice picture, but it’s not a reality we are going to see this side of eternity.

What would the perfect Lutheran congregation look like? Well, it would be filled every Sunday with perfect people. That means it would be lacking in some characteristics that are found in many congregations around us, including our own. It would be lacking that one lady who, despite being muffled by a mask, always sings too loud and slightly off key. It would be lacking the guy who, after worship in the Fellowship Hall, monopolizes the conversation. It would lack those who are arrogant and loud, the ones who send you running to find a table as far away from them as you can. The worship service would be perfect, the hymns never played too fast or too slow. It would be the perfect mix of traditional and contemporary to make you and everyone else in attendance happy. The sermon would be engaging, enlightening, entertaining, and yet only 10 minutes in length. The Pastor would never say anything that would really cause you discomfort or anger. There would be plenty of children who sat quietly through the whole service. Everyone would always be wearing masks and social distancing. Everyone would always be happy and smiling, and never have any problems with anything. That Church exists, but not this side of eternal life. Meanwhile, every congregation I know is filled with poor miserable sinners, lambs who show their miserableness in thought, word, and deed.

There are some who are searching for that perfect sheepfold, that perfect congregation. And while it may be true that some congregations have more obvious hang-ups than others, each and every congregation in this fallen world is filled not with perfect sheep, but sheep that are broken, poor miserable sinners. And they sometimes show that brokenness not just in what they think, but what they say and what they do. Welcome to this sheepfold we call Lamb of God, a sheepfold filled with poor miserable sinners just like me, just like you, just like every other sheepfold in town.

Now if this were any other kind of social gathering besides the Church, and we desired to grow and attract new members, we would do a serious self-assessment study to see how we might appear more presentable to those who might come to visit. We would single out the sheep we consider to be the most obnoxious and work to change them or get rid of them. After we did that who would be next? Who would be the next most obnoxious worshiper, and the one after that? How long would it take until the bar descended to point it rested on you, or me? As we worked toward the perfect sheepfold full of perfect lambs would there be any room for the poor miserable sinners that Christ calls into His sheepfold? Would there be any room for you or for me?

John's Message: Love the Fellow Sheep

In our Epistle Lesson John has some important ideas to help us be the Church that lives and operates in the world. He begins by reminding us what unites us together as the Church.

1 John 3:14a “**We know that we have passed out of death into life**”. We were born into this world as those who are already dying. We each have a sinful nature that was passed down from our parents, extending all the way back to Adam and Eve. Because of this sinful nature, the minute we were born we begin a life of dying. We were born spiritually dead, living apart from God, and our bodies begin the long slow process that ends in temporal death. But Jesus was born into this world to change all that. He took your sin, took your punishment, took your eternal death from you and put it all upon Himself. He died so that eternal death and separation might not be your future. And in your baptism the Spirit came and gave you what Jesus earned for you on the cross: a new life, a life lived with Him now that leads to eternal life to come. All of us gathered here today as baptized believers gather to celebrate that new life we've been given and thank our LORD for such a gracious gift.

Because of the faith that He gives us, Jesus declares us to be perfect sheep who are in right standing with Him and the Father. But the actual reality of how we appear to one another is quite different. Because all of the brokenness that we inherited from our forefather Adam is still alive and well in our hearts, we manifest that brokenness and get on one another's nerves. John tells us in **1 John 3:14** **We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death**. As sheep who have been given this new life in baptism, we are to love our fellow sheep. Now this love is not the relational love that you and I often consider love to be. That kind of love means that I get along and care for you if you get along and care for me. But if you get on my nerves one too many times, and especially if you don't return that love, then I am done with you. I am no longer beholding to love you. That is not the kind of love John is talking about. When that kind of love characterizes our life as Christians, we are not abiding in Jesus' love but abiding in the life of death we were born into.

What does the love John is talking about look like? It looks like Jesus! **1 John 3:16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.** Jesus loved us when we were not lovable. He took our sins and died for them when we didn't care one bit about them. He sacrificed His life not because we loved Him now or even because we would love Him in the future. He gave His life to forgive the sins of those who would never come to faith, who would never love Him. His love for you and me is not based on who we are, but on who He is. It's a love that only comes from Him. He gave it to you in your baptism, and He renews that love in your life as He renews your faith by the means of grace: the word preached, read, and sung, and in the Sacrament of the Altar. That's the love He calls us to have for one another, the kind of love where we would be willing to lay down our lives for those whom we like, as well as the one who really gets under our skin.

How are you doing living out that love? If your honest you're doing as miserable as I am. Now I've never murdered anyone, But I am still convicted when I read **1 John 3:15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.** Now, John must be exaggerating to make a point, right? How can anyone living in this world not get angry with his brother, let alone that fellow sheep who is always doing things that get on my nerves. Actually John is just repeating what Jesus preached in **Matthew 5:21-22** ²¹ **"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'** ²² **But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.** Does this mean that you and I are a lost cause? Does it mean that we've already been thrown out of Jesus sheepfold and left to the mercy of the demonic wolves, and are headed to eternal damnation with the devil himself? NO!

1 John 3:19-20 ¹⁹ **By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him;** ²⁰ **for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.** As you hear the expectation that we love our brothers just as Jesus loves us and compare that with your track record as one who harbors hate and impatience in your heart for those who are difficult to love, you feel the condemnation rise in your heart. And that's why Jesus, through His apostle, tells us these things. That's why Jesus preached these things. What John is preaching to us about loving one another is the Law. He's preaching it to believers, members of Jesus' sheepfold, so that makes it the 3rd use of the Law: where the Law functions as our guide. But the Law always functions in its 2nd use: that of showing us our sin.

You and I need to be reminded that we are broken, sinful, hard to handle sheep. But what is that truth John says we “are of”? It is this: our Lord and Savior died to forgive ALL of our brokenness. That is the truth that the Holy Spirit uses to reassure our hearts when we feel them breaking over our sin. Christ has taken away all your brokenness and declares you to be what you cannot be without Him, in right standing with the Heavenly Father. And that is how we are to see ourselves too. The Lord Himself declares that to be our truth because of the faith we have. And when our convicted and broken heart testifies to us otherwise, we are to remember that His Word and promise of complete forgiveness trumps what we might feel about ourselves. You are right with God, and so is your fellow brother you struggle to love. He or she is a forgiven child of the Heavenly Father, a precious sheep loved by the Good Shepherd. And that is how we are to see them too. And by the love and grace we receive from Christ through our baptism we can begin to love them that way.

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. You gather here as those who by faith hold fast to Jesus as your Lord and Savior. By this faith you have passed out of death into life. Through that gift of faith the Spirit is at work to move you to love your brothers, your fellow sheep, even the ones who are difficult to love. Our lives of faith should be characterized by loving others as Jesus loved us. As Christians we are to strive to love like Jesus loves, and yet we at times fail. But our desire, our aim, our goal as Christians should be to love as Jesus loves. That’s why our failure bothers us. The Spirit points these failures out to you not to crush you, but to draw you closer to the Savior who loved your brother perfectly in your place and keeps giving you His love so that you can love them as He does. He points out your sin, forgives it, and works to change you. That’s repentance. That’s the life of repentant faith that we are called to live out in this world. As we do so by the power of the Holy Spirit who is working in our life so that we will not abide in death, but abide in life now with Jesus’ Spirit, with the promise of eternal life to come.

The Holy Spirit moved John to write these things to present before us the goal He is working toward in our lives of faith. **1 John 3:17-18 ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.** He is at work in us to open our eyes to the needs that our brother or sister in the faith might have, the needs our fellow sheep have. Those needs are sometimes of a temporal nature such as transportation, food for those who are sick or just home from the hospital, help with yard work that they can no longer do. But sometimes those needs are patience on our part, forgiveness concerning their broken sinful flaws, and to have the same loving heart toward them that our Good Shepherd shows to us. Sometimes they need our understanding. Sometimes they need our grace. And sometimes we fail to provide these things. When we do, we are forgiven, and moved by the Spirit through that love of Christ He brings into our hearts and lives. In this love through our repentance He moves us to be more patient and loving with them and with others. He moves us and changes us through the same love and forgiveness we so desperately need and receive from Jesus.

Conclusion

There is no perfect congregation, there are no perfect sheep. Instead there is you and me. We each have our own sinful flaws. Our worship is not perfect, and the love we share with one another has not yet been made perfect. Yet Christ declares each one of us perfect, made perfect by His perfect life, His perfect sacrifice, and headed to the perfection of eternal life because of His resurrection. He accepts the efforts we put forth through our repentant faith. Shouldn't we learn to accept the efforts our fellow lambs are making in their repentant faith? Shouldn't we forgive their many faults just as Jesus forgives our many faults? Shouldn't we be ready to sacrifice our time, talents, and treasures for less than perfect lambs since Jesus sacrificed all He had to save us? This is the place where Christ draws imperfect Lambs to come to Him, and where He works to make them a little more like Him each day. He does that through His gifts of love and faith that flow to us from the cross through our baptism. May we serve to be conduits of that life changing love in the lives of one another through the work of the Holy Spirit amongst us all. Amen.