

Beloved Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

It is a nice way to think of ourselves. The beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ. It marks us in this world and distinguishes us in a rather warm and lovely light. To be loved comes at God's will. He loves us. He first loved us, and we will consider what that means. God is love and gives us Himself when he calls us then to do the same. To be loved means that we now seek to be loving and on the one hand God's people are because of the transforming power of love and are called to be because that love has yet to be perfected.

So, John is dealing with Christians, likely a specific group that he knows and loves, and they, him. They are being attacked on the level of new teachings which threaten the truth and beauty of the Good News and then too they are attacked on a personal level. They are being hated for being the people of God by so-called brothers in the faith and John says that this cannot be. In the church, we love one another.

What wonderful love this is. We no longer must be afraid of God. He loves us! We must not doubt because doubts cause fear and that is because love is not perfected in us, that we accept and hold onto this loving God. When we are freed from the wrath of God and all that mean we can live in love for one another in the church and then those around us too. Yes, in Christ because of God's love you shall be free indeed! You shall be free to love God and love your neighbour as yourself. This is the command both old and always fresh and new. Do you want to be a blessing? Love your brother in Christ! Our theme this morning is:

In Christ's Love We are Called to Love One Another

1. The First Love 2. Loving God and Our Brother 3. Born Again to Love

First Love "We love because he first loved us." To be a blessing John is telling us you must first be blessed. To love we must first be loved. Why? Well, now the story kicks in, the wonderful story of the Bible.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He created Adam and Eve in His own image. They were loved first. God made them and God loved them and then they loved Him, and they loved one another in a one-flesh hug! They loved each other for they saw the image of God in each other.

Then came the horrible day, the day that marked human history and in fact world history forever. God has asked that Adam and Eve love Him and each other

and obey the command. The LORD God had made a tree, the Bible tells us it was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and that God had forbidden eating the fruit of that tree. But the devil came and tempted Adam and Eve to hate God, and they hate and then they hated one another and hid from each other and from God.

But the good news is that God promised a saviour! John tells us that he saw, heard and even touched that saviour (I John 1). God so loved the world that he sent his only son, born of the virgin marry and to suffer under Pontius Pilate. Jesus was crucified, he died and was buried! This is good news! God saves sinners! God save His people because He loves them. This is love! When you and I were unable to love God loved us and sent Jesus to die for us. Jesus loved and suffered, hell's agony, died for us. But praise God, Jesus lives again! He rose from the dead and he is coming again. When He comes there will be a new heaven and a new earth! Blessed be God's Holy name.

Yes, in our sin we were dead to God and hated one another. United to Christ by faith and united by that first love of God we are made and alive and we can live again! To live again means that we can love God and to love one another. This is the power of Christ in us.

The heretics of John's day denied that Jesus really became flesh and blood and that he really died. They denied then this special love and what's more hated the brotherhood of believers, ridiculing them and challenging them with those words of the devil—did God really say? Yes, beloved, He did really say. God is love and if by faith you abide in love, then by Christ's power and the Holy Spirit in you, you can say that you are loved, the fellowship of believers is loved, and a fellowship is a place of love and light and truth. We love because He first loved us, not because we initiated it, or because we deserved it but because our God is an awesome God and his Son the gift of amazing love!

It was John who told us in chapter 15 of His gospel as we have it today in our Bibles, that Jesus said, that if we abide in him, we will bear fruit. Ultimately that fruit is the fruit of love—loving God and the brothers!

Loving God and Our Brother Writes John, by the Spirit, "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not

seen.” Let’s do a little thinking about this then and hear what the Spirit is saying to the church and to us this morning.

Who is the loved community on earth? Well, say many on the earth, our community is blessed, ought to be recognized or comes first. Individuality is now, more than ever, the thing emphasized I suppose and so the group I identify myself is to be exalted and deemed most important. But what is John saying? John is telling us that there is a community on the earth called the dearly loved children of God! There is a community who though they were sinful, and still, are sinful, God sent His Son in the flesh to die on the cross to take away the anger of God and the fear of His beloved children. Once we as a community were like Adam and Eve, fearful of God. Though we did not know the God of love, every human knows that God is! They know that it is not right, they sense that and then either run from God or create idols, to create a god more acceptable. Then God bursts into the human reality, takes on human flesh and blood and dies for us that we might be called the children of God and that is what we are.

Now if we are loved by God and we are the objects of His love and Jesus loves the brotherhood in this sacrificial way then it must need be that we love one another. We must love the brothers whom God loves. How can we say that we love God whom we have not seen if we do not love those whom God loves, whom we can see? What would that say about us?

In the context of the letter, John is writing to a church (which one? We do not know) which is under attack from Rome as an illegal religion and by those who call them Christians but deny that Jesus was ever truly human, that he only appeared to die. What’s more, denying this they also denied that a person had to live a good life. They could even say that spiritually they were good and without sin, and even if they did sin, it did not matter because they were saved. Now, John says that if we say that we do not sin, we make God a liar and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10) But these heretics were persuasive and persistent, but if it was hard for new Christians to stay true to God based on holding to the teaching, John says look at the way they greet the brotherhood. Are they a blessing to the brotherhood? No, they hate the brotherhood. If they see a church member suffering, they walk on by. If they see the sister in Christ poor and needy, they walk on by. They are like the priest and Levite in Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan, (Luke 10:30-37) who walked by the beaten man. It is as James wrote,

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:14-17)

John is the one who quoted Jesus as saying Jesus is the vine and we are the branches and if we live in Him and He is us we will/must bear good fruit. Good fruits are works of love and righteousness. Now then, these heretics did not love, persecuted, ridiculed and generally hated the true community of God on earth. That is how we know that though they say they are Christians they are not. That people who say they are Christians can say that they love God yet hate the children of God is why Athanasius could be exiled for holding onto the great truth of the Trinity and Jesus as true God and true man. It is why the church gone sour could put a death penalty on Luther and Calvin heads. It was of course why Jesus was crucified and so horrifically abused by the very people he came to save. He came as the darkness but the darkness, claiming to be the people of God said Jesus was the sinner and the blasphemer and worthy of the cursed death of the tree. No, these people say one thing but are known by their fruit and they are no blessing to the people of God—His beloved children.

And what of an Elijah who was persecuted by the King and queen of Israel? He loved God and loved the people of God and was a blessing! What of John the Baptist who loved God and brought the good news of the Kingdom? He was a blessing to the community of the children of God. So were Stephen and all the disciples most who died for the truth! Martin Luther and John Calvin were a blessing to the community. Consider Jesus! Amazing love, how can it be? Jesus died for you and me! Jesus loves me/us, yes, I know for the Bible tells me so. Living for Jesus a life that is true. His love constrains me to answer his call to strive and please Him in all that we do. Thankful to Jehovah for His gifts to me, I pledge myself to be ready to serve, my God, my church, my neighbour and my corps!

So, there it is beloved. The children of God love the children of God and if they do not, they really are not the children of God and they are deceived. Therefore, we are commanded to love the Lord our God and love our neighbour as ourselves.

Born Again to Love Finally then, “Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister! It is so! Thus, says the Lord. This is non-negotiable as a command and cannot be other as the new reality of our new life in Jesus.

If we had to describe what living for Jesus means, what would you say? First, I think to live for Jesus means that we love God. It means that we are thankful to God and want to Honour Him. He gave his only son! This ought to amaze us always. When we feel down, or blue or frustrated by the world and the bad things going on around us, when we are bullied or we fall into sin and feel so bad we can hardly go on, we remember that in Christ we are loved. With God there is forgiveness and we start anew: fresh forgiven and loved. So, living for Jesus and loving God means that we are thankful and humble and would anything God asks us to do.

What does God ask us to do? He asks us to live for Jesus. He asks us to light in the world, to speak the truth in love and to love our neighbour as yourself. That must start in the church. The devil knows that the best way to break the church down is through hatred in the church. Strife, and being jealous or envious leads to bitterness and anger. We have disagreements sometimes over every little thing and the devil, and the demons get in and so we are like Adam and Eve, we cannot stand one another, and we blame one another. God says now, “Do you love me? Keep my commandments. This is my command, love me and love one another. Anything else is to disrespect God and to make Jesus’ death on the cross meaningless.

So, there is a challenge for us as the church today. Factions are everywhere. There are factions between us in our local church. Gossip, insulting, pride and arrogance runs through us. We are vulnerable. Remember the church in Corinth. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10-11 addresses the whole matter that some can fellowship at the table of the demons with no problems and yet at the Lord’s Supper table in Corinth the rich disrespect the poor and the table of the Lord and Jesus’ body. Paul is not impressed, and Jesus is not impressed! Some were dying—fallen asleep—there because of this!!! (I Corinthians 11:30). God is not mock. Let us love one another in our own congregation.

Let us love one another in the congregations that are true and seeking to be honest in their proclaiming the truth of God’s Word, salvation in Christ alone and seeking to hold the Bible as true for this and every age. We are being ridiculed. We

need to be more open. We are even being told that if we do not accept a woman's right to have an abortion, we are not Christian. If we do not accept homosexual or the transgender agenda, we are not loving—not Christian. On it goes. Love one another speaks to keep the commandments and holding ourselves to holiness and truth. We will do this, and it will likely more and more come at personal freedom and cost. But if we live for Jesus, it is because God has blessed us and makes us through His love in us to be a blessing to the church and in fact, even the world.

Love one another beloved, because you are loved. This love teaches us to say no to ungodliness. This love constrains us to answer the call, to love God, to love one another, to give Him, our all! Amen.