

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
1 John 4:16-21  
May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016

The phone in my dorm room rang one evening during my freshman year in college. On the other end was a high school classmate. He wanted to know if I heard the news. I asked, “What news?” He said that Duane, a friend of us both – and also for me – a person I was confirmed with – perished in a car accident on his way home from pulling an overnight shift at work. I was in shock, to say the least.

About 12 years later that friend that made that phone call to me also passed away. He left behind a wife and two small children. He died of cancer leaving us in shock.

Back in 2006 I married a young couple, the man was a member of the parish I served in Millstadt. He was smart, outgoing, and a person who I had the opportunity to get close to. He was an active member of the church and was starting a wonderful life with his brand new bride. Not long after the wedding, Keith and his dad were in a boat on the Missouri river. It capsized. His father made it to shore, but Keith did not. Again, I, along with so many others, am left devastated and in shock.

This past week, as I was reading and rereading the texts appointed for this 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Trinity, especially this one from 1 John chapter 4, for some reason I just couldn’t help recalling these tragedies. In the midst of life’s “horribleness”, still remains God’s love. “*And so we have come to know and believe in the love that God has for us. God is love.*” And, John continues, “*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear...*”

Knowing and relying on what God has for us is crucial in times like these. You, perhaps, recall your own memories of life’s tragedies that leave you in shock. And what does God have for us? It’s simple according to 1 John chapter 4. What God has is love. What God happens to be is love. So, for mothers and fathers, for spouses and children, for family and friends who lost loved ones whose time was way too short – who know tragedy all too well – all of us need to know – we need to rely...on love.

The Apostle John talks about love – and how convenient is that for us? Isn’t that what we as Christians are all about? Doesn’t Paul say in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 that “*these three remain: faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love.*”? Didn’t we just hear in the Epistle reading and in the sermon that God IS love? Yes, yes and yes! John talks about love 19 different times in the Gospel of St. John. And then in the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John – a much shorter writing than the Gospel – John uses that word, “love” 24 different times. Half the times that love is mentioned are right here in verses 16 through 21 (12 times).

Three more times, elsewhere in this epistle, John talks about love in a negative way. He talks about what we should not love. These things get in the way of true Godly love. This kind of love really isn’t love at all. Only the kind of love that comes from God – that God is – is true love. All other kinds of love are a façade.

In Chapter 2 starting at verse 15 John says, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world.*” God’s love is different than the world’s love. The world’s love – or love of the world – really isn’t love at all. At least not the way God is love. But when all of our effort or even priority goes to these things – our love is for these things and not for the Lord. This is what John warns us against. And this is what we do.

Paul says in Ephesians Chapter 5, “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her...*” This is what is expected of men who have taken a wife. We are supposed to love our wives just as much as our Lord Jesus loved His bride – the church. Men, we have

not done what is expected of us. We have different priorities. Sometimes it's the love of money or the love of recreation that gets put ahead of our wives. Sometimes it's the love of our job or our love of being away from home. Sometimes it's the love of someone else that causes our direct disobedience to such a command that comes from our Lord. God expects us men to love our wives like Jesus loved the church. How are we doing on that one, fellas? Not good.

It's not just us husbands – it's all of us. We take this precious word, love, and abuse its purity and meaning. We could say that the man who takes another woman commits adultery. So does the man, or woman, who takes up loving something from this world more than their spouse as well. We commit spiritual adultery when we do not love, above all things that which God would have us to love. We commit spiritual adultery when our Lord's Church, His Holy name, His gifts are placed in the back seat of our lives. To be perfectly honest, who among us is innocent?

Here's our chance, today, to proclaim our fidelity to the Lord. Here's our chance to go back to the "marriage" that God has brought together through Jesus. This marriage is the one that our Lord has instituted between Himself and the Church. And guess who we are – the church. We dare not take our fidelity to our Lord for granted – because our Lord didn't.

The very next verse after our text from 1 John chapter 4 says this: "*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God...*" Faith in Christ is a proclamation of fidelity to one God – one Lord – believing and trusting in one baptism. These are things that are given to us by our Lord who holds us dear through a gift of life and forgiveness. Our faithful Lord shows His commitment to us by what He has done. Through that Gospel work we can be confident that our Lord is faithful when we were not faithful.

That "being faithful" came through the word, "love" from 1 John chapter 4. This love is perfected with us by God. Our loving God and loving one another is imperfect. We put all sorts of conditions on love... how someone treats us... how much we are getting out of it... and so on. But where our love fails, God's love makes perfect. It is true we are supposed to love our God with all our heart with all our soul and all our might – as Deuteronomy chapter 6 reminds us. That's on us. That's what God expects. And that is more than just doing the best we can. But where our love fails, our Lord's never does. It was His underserved faithfulness that saves us. Lord never stops loving us or giving His unfailing gift of life.

I am comforted by the fact that those three young men I mentioned earlier knew the Lord's love for them. Especially comforting to me was Keith's love, the young man who drowned in the Missouri River – especially since I was his pastor. You see, he died after I had already come back to Platte Woods to be your pastor. Yet, I'm comforted to know that when Pastor Matthew Hoehner, Keith's pastor and a good friend of mine from back during seminary days, preached the funeral sermon, he read from a journal that Keith kept, and the family had found, after he died. Apparently in this journal Keith wrote even more about his love for his Lord. The journal that the family found after his death was further testimony that Keith lived the faith that he professed. It was further testimony that Keith loved his Lord and did not take for granted his precious gift of faith.

"*And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love.*" True love: between a man and wife – between you and your family – between you and your fellow parishioners and neighbors. True love: that brings God's people together in Christ Jesus. True love: that is God Himself who is reconciled to us through the blood of Jesus and made us His very one. He has blessed us because He first loved us. He has forgiven us, because He first loved us. He preserves us, because He first loved us. And we have the promise of everlasting life secured for us today, because Jesus first loved us. May God richly bless you and keep you always – to love, in Christ, one another and your Lord Jesus above all things. Amen.

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