

At Home Worship
April 18, 2021 3rd Sunday of Easter
First Presbyterian Church-Sweetwater

Find a Sacred Space

Sit comfortably, perhaps with something warm to drink, where you can look out on the beauty Of God's creation today. Read aloud or quietly to yourself, or as a family share the various parts of the service.

Greeting - The Lord be with you. **And also, with you.**

Call to Worship and Prayer of Praise

Praise to the Lord God Almighty, who is and was and evermore shall be.

Glory to our Lord, for Christ came to bring us God's truth and love.

And these virtues, we are to share with all who will hear the Good News.

For in our sharing God's blessing continues and is multiplied.

Let our hearts be filled with joy for the wonderful blessings of God.

Blessed be the name of the Lord!

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "Glorify Thy Name " #2016

1. Father, we love you, we worship and adore you, glorify thy name in all the earth.
Glorify thy name, glorify thy name, glorify thy name in all the earth.

2. Jesus, we love you, we worship and adore you, glorify thy name in all the earth.
Glorify thy name, glorify thy name, glorify thy name in all the earth.

3. Spirit, we love you, we worship and adore you, glorify thy name in all the earth.
Glorify thy name, glorify thy name, glorify thy name in all the earth.

A Time of Confession and Assurance

O God, so often we seem to live our lives as if Jesus had not died for our sins, and we do not understand the wonderful promise of eternal life we have received in the resurrection. We fret and fuss over things that do not truly matter and we turn against each other for no good reason. Forgive us, O Lord, and help us again to do unto others as we would have others do unto us.

(silent prayer of personal confession).....Amen.

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us. Friends, Believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "What Wondrous Love is This" #215 VSS. 1, 2, 4

1. What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul! What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss, to bear the dreadful curse for my soul,
for my soul, to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.

2. When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down, When I was sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down beneath God's righteous frown, Christ laid aside His crown for my soul,
for my soul, Christ laid aside His crown for my soul.

4. And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on; And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be; and through eternity, I'll sing on, I'll sing on;
And through eternity, I'll sing on.

Love In Action

1 John 3:11-24

There is a ridiculous old story about a fisherman who was enormously successful. Each morning he would take his small boat out on the lake and within a few hours he would return with a boat loaded with fish. People wondered, how did he do it?

One day a stranger showed up and asked the man if he could go along the next time the man went out fishing. The man said, "Sure. Meet me here tomorrow morning at 5:00 and we will go out." The next morning the two of them made their way through the early morning mist to a small cove where the fisherman stopped the boat and cut off the motor. The stranger wondered where the man's fishing equipment was. He had no rod and reel. All the stranger saw was a small net and a rusty tackle box.

Slowly the man pulled the tackle box over to himself, opened it, and took out a red stick of dynamite. Taking a match, he lit the fuse of the dynamite, held it for a moment and heaved it into the water. There was a terrific blast. Soon he was dipping up fish in his small net and filling up the boat. After watching this the stranger reached into his hip pocket and pulled out his wallet. Opening up the wallet he flashed a badge-the badge of a game warden. Somberly he said, "You're under arrest." This didn't seem to rattle the fisherman. He reached into the tackle box, pulled out another stick of dynamite, lit it, held it for a moment while the fuse burned on down, then handed it to the game warden. "Now," he said, "Are you just going to sit there or are you going to fish?"

That's the question I get from our lesson from 1 John. "Are you going to sit there or are you going to fish?" We read, "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and truth." In other words, anybody can say "I love you." Words are cheap. Action counts.

Of course, the matter is not simply "either...or." I don't believe that the writer of 1 John meant that we should not use the words. Father John Powell tells about a beautiful friendship between two brother priests which ended in tragedy when one was hit by a car and killed. When told, the other ran to the scene, broke through the crowd of onlookers and police, and kneeling at the side of his friend took the lifeless form in his arms and cried out, "Don't die! You can't die! I never told you that I loved you."

Sometimes the words HAVE to be spoken. In the delightful *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye asks his wife Goldie, "Do you love me?" She thinks he's lost his mind. She answers in a song: For twenty-five years I've washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house, given you children, milked the cow, after twenty-five years, why talk about love right now?" Most of us understand

that sometimes we must talk about love. But talk is not enough. The writer of this letter is not telling us not to say, "I love you." We have to read the verse before this one to understand his word of counsel. In verse 17 we read, "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?" Then he adds, "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and truth." In other words, there are some people who talk about love but who do absolutely nothing about it.

Several years ago, there was a famous PEANUTS cartoon in which Schroeder, that piano loving intellectual, was interrupted as he often was by his infatuated admirer, Lucy. Lucy asked Schroeder, "Schroeder, do you know what love is?" Schroeder abruptly stopped his playing, stood to his feet and said precisely, "Love: noun, to be fond of, a strong affection for or an attachment or devotion to a person or persons." Then he sat back down and resumed playing his piano. Lucy sat there stunned and then murmured sarcastically, "On paper, he's great."

That is the kind of love that I John is writing about. Love on paper. Long on sentiment, short on action. Sometimes we have to ask, "Are you going to sit there or are you going to fish?" There are some characteristics of Christian love that we ought to consider this morning. The writer of I John gives us some standards for knowing if our love is genuine Christian love.

I. Christian Love is Always in Keeping with God's Commandments.

In the first place, Christian love is always in keeping with God's commandments. I hope you will listen closely and consider this truth with me carefully. Several times in this passage the writer speaks of "keeping (God's) commandments." This is an important admonition.

The word love has been gravely cheapened in our time. In the 1960s and ~70s it became fashionable for educated people to embrace what is known as Situational Ethics. I do not want to misrepresent this viewpoint, but in a nutshell the teaching of situational ethics is that there is no longer any absolute right or wrong in life. The only way that we can know what is right or wrong in any given situation is to apply the rule of love. (After all, didn't Jesus teach us that love is the great commandment?) Therefore, we should always ask, what is the loving thing to do? Working from this philosophy many ethicists concluded that, therefore, there might be times when stealing was "right" because somehow at the time it was "the loving thing to do."

Again, I don't want to be unfair. Situational Ethics came as a corrective to excessive legalism and made its contribution. However, it did not deal with the remarkable power of the human brain to rationalize almost any situation and to turn almost any action into a loving action.

The most bizarre example occurred in connection with the infamous Charles Manson family. Most of us remember the awful slaughter at the home of actress Sharon Tate in 1969. Susan Atkins was one of the participants in that scene of almost unparalleled carnage. When she was asked about the rationale behind the savaging of Sharon Tate, who was eight months pregnant at the time, Miss Atkins is said to have smiled and cooed, "You have to have a real love in your heart to do this for people." The deputies said that Atkins seemed grotesquely sincere.

Obviously, this is a radical example, but the principle is sound. Be careful if anybody tries to tell you that something is the loving thing to do if it conflicts with the commandments of God. Jesus

did not say that the commandment to love makes the Ten Commandments obsolete. He said simply that all the law and prophets depend on love for God and love for humanity. (Matthew 22:40) I John tells us that to love God IS to keep his commandments. Christian love is always in keeping with God's commandments.

II. Christian Love is always "In Mission."

In the second place, Christian love is always "in mission." There is no love for God that is not coupled with love for people. The self-righteous, self-centered, "Lone Ranger" kind of Christian is basically not Christian at all. That's harsh, but it's true.

I do not suppose that there is any creature more repulsive to God than the self-satisfied saint who prides himself on his piety and religiosity and turns his nose up at his next-door neighbor. You think I exaggerate? Then you have never really read about Jesus' encounters with the Pharisees. It was not the Jewish faith that offended Jesus. He was himself a Jew. It was those who used their religion as a bludgeon to elevate themselves by beating down others that were the object of his great scorn. Equally as offensive, however, in Christ's eyes are those nice, sweet Christians who have good intentions about real service to the world but never really seem to get into action. Consider our obligations to the poor and dispossessed of this world. A major portion of the world's wealth is concentrated in so called "Christian" nations. What better plan could God have for meeting the needs of the unfortunate of this world than have his people to share out of their abundance?

A Christian lady was visiting Ethiopia, that land that has known so much suffering and despair. She saw the small children with the swollen bellies of malnutrition. She saw the diseased and dying by the thousands from the ravages of drought. She said that she was in such despair that she "felt like screaming out at God." Then she realized that God "was screaming out at (her)." We are God's plan for the caring for the unfortunate of this world! Are we going to sit there or are we going to fish? Christian love is always centered in the needs of others, whether they are around the world or across the street.

III. Christian Love Is Always a Response to God's Love for Us.

There is one final thing to be said. Christian love is always a response to God's love for us. I John links our ability to love to our faith in Jesus Christ. This too is important to see. It has become fashionable in recent years to emphasize the importance of selflove. Often, we hear that we cannot love others if we do not love ourselves. There is some truth to that, obviously, but there is also a grave danger. WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES US LOVEABLE? Is it our sparkling personalities or our shining faces? Is it our moral rectitude or our giving spirit? If you say, "Yes," you do not understand the real nature of humanity. Deep within the hearts of every human being is the potential for unspeakable evil. That is the one lesson of all history. If people could look into our hearts, most of us would be unlovable indeed. There is only one way that we can truly love ourselves. That is to see that we love because HE FIRST LOVED US.

Look around you at the results of a decade of emphasis on selflove. Many of us are so into ourselves that we have lost the ability to truly love others. We need to see our own unworthiness in stark contrast to God's great love for us. Then we can properly love ourselves. That is why that even in this season when we celebrate the empty tomb, we dare not lose sight of the cross. We

simply cannot understand what real love is until we see the suffering Christ giving his life to redeem us.

The Greek word that we often employ to express God's love is "agape." Somewhere I heard about a delegate to a church assembly who kept hearing the word "agape" used but had no idea what it meant. He did not want to show his ignorance by asking, so he found a dictionary and looked it up. For the word agape the dictionary said it meant "with mouth wide open."

If we understand the cross and the wonderful love which is expressed there, we will stand there with our "mouth wide open." It is amazing that in spite of our unworthiness, the God of all creation loves us each as his own children. That is what gives us the ability to love ourselves as well as our ability to love others.

The people I know who are the most loving are also those closest to the heart of God.

What is Christian love? It is love that acknowledges the commandments of God. It is love that acknowledges that we do not love God if we cannot love our fellow human beings. It is love that is a response to the love of God made manifest in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is love not only in word and speech but, in deed and action. It is love that doesn't just sit there. It finds a place to carry out the mission of Christ.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "Help Us Accept Each Other" #754

1. Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us; teach us as sister, brother, each person to embrace. Be present, Lord, among us and bring us to believe we are ourselves accepted and meant to love and live.
2. Teach us, O Lord, your lessons, as in our daily life we struggle to be human and search for hope and faith. Teach us to care for people, for all not just for some, to love them as we find them or as they may be come.
3. Let your acceptance change us, so that we may be moved in living situations to do the truth in love; to practice your acceptance until we know by heart the table of forgiveness and laughter's healing art.
4. Lord, for today's encounters with all who are in need, who hunger for acceptance, for righteousness and bread, we need new eyes for seeing, new hands for holding on: renew us with your Spirit; Lord, free us, make us one!

Blessing

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. 2 Timothy 4:22