A Life of Love – God is Love

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SEND ME OUT” – I like that…“there is hope for every soul; send me out to make You [Christ Jesus] known.” For the past three years, Labor Day Sunday has been our Labor 4 Your Neighbor Sunday. It’s a Sunday when we “SEND” ourselves out to put our hands and hearts to work to “give hope” to people who could use some encouragement, who could use some love. It’s a day (like everyday, really) to make Jesus known, through our prayers, and words and actions today. We want to make Jesus’ LOVE known by “Shining His Light” (as the song goes) in the darkest places, where there is brokenness, pain or sorrow.

LOVE is the message today. Now don’t do this now (I know some of you’ve got your I-Phone or I-Pad on even now), trust me on this, but if you were to do a Google search for the word “LOVE,” you’d get back around 8,640,023,002 responses! On Amazon, you’d find some 325,914 book titles with the word “LOVE” in them. And what about those Number One songs on the Billboard Charts over the decades? On Labor Day Monday, 1955, “Love is a Many-Splendored Thing,” by the Four Aces; “All You Need Is Love,” the Boys from Liverpool, Labor Day 1967; “Endless Love,” 1981 (Diana Ross and Lionel Ritchie); and, Beyoncé’s and Jay-Z’s “Crazy In Love,” Labor Day Monday 2003!

Love is hugely important to us and to the culture we’re a part of. And our culture often gets “Love” wrong. Watch TV, download that song or movie, cruise the Internet, flip through that magazine, and you and I know that we don’t know what Love truly, really is.

A Life of LOVE is today’s topic. “Love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, mind, soul, strength, and LOVE your neighbor as yourself.” It’s Jesus’ “double imperative” for us: Love God and Love Others. We’re meant to live a life like Jesus’ – a life overflowing with Love for God and for others.

Let’s go to John’s First Letter, then, his 4th chapter, which is his “God is Love” chapter. We’re going to walk through it, two verses at a time, and see what we find out about a Life of Love, the call to BE Love, to go out and Love (1 John 4:7-12).

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is
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born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love (vs. 7&8).

He is the son of Zebedee, the first cousin to Jesus. This John, he’s the gospel writer and the John who ends up exiled to the Greek island of Patmos (Aegean Sea). He wrote down his Revelation there. In this first of three letters, John addresses his friends as “beloved.” These dear friends, from in and around Ephesus, have a place in John’s heart. He cares enough to reinforce this 1st century church’s commitment to mutual, sacrificial love, in the Way of Jesus.

Love is from God, John says. God creates Love; God gives Love; God is Love. John says, “If you don’t know this, then you don’t know God and you don’t have love in you!” John Piper puts it this way: “God’s absolute fullness of life and truth and beauty and goodness and all other perfections of God” IS LOVE. All of God, who God is, overflows with Love. There is nothing more important on earth than to understand this Love of God. There’s nothing more important to understand than that YOU are special AND that GOD LOVES YOU. The person who has had a personal failure in life needs to understand that God loves him/her—the person who has attempted suicide/in trouble with the law/abused as a child/ the teenager struggling with issues of self-worth/a difficult time at work. There is nothing more important on earth to understand than that YOU are special and you are LOVED by God.

God’s love was revealed to us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins (vs. 9&10).

It is the simplest yet profound statement in all of Scripture: “God is Love”. It completely explains God’s true nature. Out of love, God gave up His one and only Son. Because of love, God freely released His Son and sent Him to us, SO that we might have LIFE like we’ve never known it before. This Love, John says, is real, it’s concrete, it’s not some pie-in-the-sky Love. What God did cost God. Our human condition was all about “sin and death,” until God gave us LIFE AND LOVE in the person of Jesus (Colossians 1:13-14). God in Christ rescued us from darkness that we might have a life and live a life of love. And this life of love? We’re supposed to make it real, and visible, for others to see. More on this later.

Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us (vs. 11&12).
John doesn’t let up on this Life of Love! “Love” here is the apex one of the four loves, in the Greek. John is not talking here about “Eros” love, or sensual love; he’s not referring to “Storge,” or familial love. He’s not talking about “Phileo” love, friendly, brotherly/sisterly love. From verses 7 to 21 John is highlighting the ultimate of love, God’s primary love, AGAPE love. The word Agape Love, it occurs 27 times in 15 verses! Twenty-seven times over, John is urging us on to see and understand this God, Who is Love. John urges us on to know that THIS Love lives in us!

God’s AGAPE love is an unselfish and sacrificial love. In verse 11, God leads us by example: “Since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.” Notice the logic here. If God is Holy, then we must be holy. If God is Mercy, then we must be merciful. If God is Love, then we must be loving. The “must” or the “ought” comes NOT out of outward pressure. The “must,” the “ought” is fueled by one’s own internal desire to give to others this “so much” love, which God with “so much” love has given us! The implication, as Paul writes in Romans, is this: With “God’s love (being) poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit from Christ Jesus” how could we NOT, then, pour ourselves out in love for others (Romans 5:5)?

Here’s what John is getting at. This Love which is exemplified in Jesus, is the Love perfected in and through the people of Jesus. God’s love is perfected—it’s made real, and visible, for all to see—when God’s love is re-produced (passed on, poured out) in us, among us, to others!

What does this sacrificial Love look like face to face? Rick and Vicky, who offered me their land-line phone, water and good company when I rolled my car up into their yard (with a shredded, flattened left rear tire) off a narrow country road in Pennsylvania last month. What does this generous, spontaneous love look like? Our Deacon Agape Team walking closely with a single, working mom providing her with some rent money, meeting regularly to pray with her and to work on her monthly budget. This reach-out-in-love Love? It’s simply a friend, who every other week, without fail, over lunch, listens and encourages and prays with her friend, whose young adult child died suddenly almost two years ago now. A long-time church member, who drives around on the weekends to Tag Sales, collecting free or left-over clothes to drop off at CHO (Community Helping Others). It’s four boys here, who each gave up their entire allowances a few weeks ago, $120, for the Stop Hunger Now event during Children’s Mission Camp.
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Whatever sacrificial loving God helps you do, go for it. Don’t settle for less. LOVE within your “comfort-zone,” or ask God to help you “step out” of your comfort zone with compassion—to reach out to the broken, the sick, the poor. God uses every big or little unselfish act of love to CHANGE THE WORLD.

(Showed the Video, with this content) “We settle for less; we blend in and put up walls....But you were created for more, you are a child of God. You were created for an extraordinary life—A life like Jesus; you were meant to change the world! You were created for an earth-shaking life, full of compassion, overflowing with God’s LOVE. God became man to live among us; he directly involved himself in the world’s brokenness, and so must we. Jesus cared for the broken, the sick, the poor. And so can we. Jesus came to get messy, emotionally, physically, relationally, socially, and so should we. Are you willing to trust God? Are you willing to dream again? Are you willing to change the world?

I like that; let’s dream again. Let’s change the world by becoming more like Christ, each of us, together! I want this for our church—to live a life overflowing with Love for God and for others. It’s what we were created, redeemed and called to be. “Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another [even if and when it gets messy!] if we love one another, God lives in us, [and God’s Love will be seen in us]” (1 John 4:11-12). We want people to know, don’t we, that we are Christians by our Love.

We’ve got this number one Strategic Goal: to be TRANSFORMED into the likeness of Christ. Our vision and mission is “Becoming Like Christ, Together, For the World.” Now I confess that I’m not entirely sure what it looks like, but I want a “transformed life” in Christ. I’m not always sure how to go about “Becoming Like Christ”, but I sure want to. A “transformed life”? It’s seeking to be holier and healthier in Christ, with others, today, more than you were yesterday. “Becoming like Christ”? It’s choices you make and actions you take today that are even more loving than the actions you took yesterday. A “transformed life” is a challenging, wondrous, beautiful, daily journey for a Christian’s lifetime. And so worth it! Because of God’s Love it’s worth it, for others to see and recognize JESUS and His Love for you and me more clearly in you and me today, and the day after, and the next day forward.