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SERMON

5th Sunday of Easter

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What do we know about love? Everything and nothing, right? We know that without love babies cease to thrive. We know from experiments that don't bear thinking about, baby monkeys will choose to go without food if they're forced to make a choice between food and being in their mother's arms. Actually we know that without love any of us cease to thrive, babies to adults. We know that people can do the impossible because of love - lift cars off people pinned underneath. We know people will starve themselves so their children can eat - out of love. We know parents raise teenagers.... Which at times might seem like another impossible thing to accomplish, and yet it's done every day. Out of love. We know a lot about love. And many times we feel like we know nothing about love. Sometimes human beings act like they know nothing about love. We can think of the wars and famines, of racism and poverty, of domestic abuse and child trafficking, and it sure looks like there's a lot of love missing from the world. We can begin to feel so discouraged.

You've probably heard this story... One day God was looking down at earth and saw all of the selfish behavior that was going on. So God called one of the angels. "Go down to earth. Find out what is going on." The angel returned and reported to God. "Yes, it is bad on Earth; 95% are misbehaving and only 5% are not."

God thought for a moment, and then decided to get a second opinion. So a second angel was sent.

The angel returned and went directly to God. "Yes, it's true. The World is in decline; 95% are misbehaving, but 5% are being good." God was not pleased. "I will send an e-mail to the 5% who are good. I want to encourage them, and help them keep going. The future of the world depends on them."

Do you know what the e-mail said?

No?

You mean, you didn't get that e-mail either?

That story reminds us of the cruelty taking place daily in the world. Or it might speak to our own fears of not being good enough, loving enough. But John is reminding us of what Jesus came to tell us. The NRSV translation goes like this:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. And

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Or as The Message Bible translates it:

God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and matures in us.

So there it is. We were made to love. We are hard-wired to love. All of us. Just like those baby monkeys. Of course, along the way in our lives we get distracted, scared, turned around so we lose our way. But we can always find it again. We can always come back to the path of love, come back to the Way of Jesus. Sometimes our fear or maybe cynicism will try to tell us stories - that we're not good enough at loving, that

we're too flawed to do a good job of it, that our hearts aren't big enough or wise enough or kind enough. But that isn't true. Those are lies. We are hard-wired to love, uniquely designed that way by the Creator. The One who is the original source of love. Jesus says so. A source we can count on.

This doesn't mean we can just sit back and let love do its work within us. We are in relationship with the love that is God. And we all know relationships only thrive when we work on them. We are continually in a place of choosing. Choosing to love. This moment. And this moment. And the next moment. With every breath we get to choose - love or not. The story from Acts gives us the formula.

The story from Acts gives us the formula. First - you have to be present, be there in yourself *where the love is growing*. And then be there in the world where the love is needed. Like Phillip. He did not see a eunuch. He did not see an Ethiopian. He did not see someone less than him, to be avoided. What he saw was someone in pain. Someone searching for answers. And what the eunuch experienced was someone who saw into his heart. And then of course Phillip told him all about Jesus. We all get chances like this - to see into the heart of someone who is used to being viewed as less than. As suspect. My men friends who happen to be African-American tell me of people coming towards them in a neighbourhood, who cross over to the other side of the street. Because, you know, a big black man... could be dangerous. My UVic friend from the Cowichan peoples told me about women calling him a drunken Indian when he was walking in downtown Victoria. Was there any evidence of alcohol? Nope. Never would be. We get to make choices. To be friendly or suspicious. To be open-hearted. To be present.

Second you need to notice when someone is interested in this love. What did Phillip do? He asked a question. "You want to know more?" That's a question we could ask. Or any number of other questions. We might start with "Tell me about yourself - what do you want me to know about you? What's really important to you?" Responding to the interest.

And third you have to be willing to teach. Share from your experience. 'Here's what it's like for me. This is what Jesus is doing in *my* life.' Course that means taking time to consider - what *is* Jesus doing in your life! Where's he hanging out in your day-to-day reality?

It's work. But it's the best and most important work of any we ever do. Sometimes this work will all take place within ourselves, as we, with God's help, grow ourselves into a greater and greater capacity to love. And sometimes this work takes place in the world around us. Whether inner or outer work, we have to be present, interested, even curious about any absence of love we notice. And the teaching? I think the teaching about God's love takes place when we act with love towards ourselves and towards others. In the world when we help others - family, neighbours, people in the community - we are teaching. AND when we are unafraid to name out loud our love and our God... we are teaching. When we stop worrying whether people are going to

think we're weird, when we're willing to step outside our comfort zones and love where it's most challenging to do so and to speak of our actions as God's love, awake and thriving in the world... we are teaching. And we just might discover - God's love at work in us and working through us in new and unexpected ways. Outside the traditional, beyond the church's rulebook, past the boundaries of life as usual. And then we'll know that once again God's love has led us out past where the angels fear to tread, out where the love is needed most. And then... we'll be living the Kingdom actually.
Amen.