Sermon: "Loving One Another" Series: "Abide: 1st John"
Pastor Dave Sattler NSAC April 10, 2022 1 John 4:7-21
Other Texts: Deuteronomy 6:5/11, Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 5:8

Sources: Bible Gateway, NIV Life Application Bible, YouVersion. Commentaries: Gary Burge, John Stott, Tom Thatcher, & Curtis Vaughn. Books: *"Letting Go"* by Fenelon (1973). Articles: *"You Know, 'Love One Another' Really Is Enough"* by Michael Pahl (May 8, 2017), *"Can Christians Only Truly Love Others?"* By WordPress (Jan 15, 2015), UGM Lent Reading by Shelley Stout (2022). Sermons: Jeremy Rios (Feb 6/22, NSAC), DPS (Nov 25/2017).

I. Introduction & Review:

- Hi, everyone. I'm Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC.
- Thank you so much for joining us today.
- Let me just say, we are so blessed by your faithfulness to Jesus and your commitment to His church over these past two years.
- As one of the pastors I want to say, thanks for sticking with us!
- It's been great to welcome many newcomers to our church during CoVID.
- And, together with us long-timers, as we grow together in community, I'm excited to see what the Lord does in, among, and through us as His people in the coming days.
- Have to admit, I'm feeling a little exposed after Jeremy last week gave you all a 'grid for smoking out false teaching—and, false teachers.'
- 'Course, I had to be the first to preach after that!
- ***<Slide>*** Today we continue our series, *Abide*, from the Letter of 1 John.
- For the third time in this short letter, John turns to the subject of mutual love. How well we love each other is both the supreme test of how deep we are abiding in God, and, a primary way God is made manifest among His people—and, in the world.
- It's apparent the beloved-disciple-of-Jesus-now-apostle, John, envisions a church community so transformed by the **love of God** that **love for one another** becomes a natural by-product.
- ILL — 4th-Century theologian Jerome tells a story about the Apostle John. Retired, old and frail, unable to walk, his disciples would carry him into the church gathering.
- And every Lord's Day, these were John's words to his beloved congregation: ***<Slide>*** "Little children, love one another." (X3)
- This went on week after week, until at last, a little weary of this repeated message, his disciples asked him, "Master, why do you always say this?"
- "Because," John replied, "it is the Lord's command, and if this only is done, it is enough." — Story in Michael Pahl, May 8/17

- Now, scholars really have no way of verifying this story, but it certainly sounds a lot like John—the author of the Gospel and Letters of John.
- John's writings are <u>filled</u> with exhortations for God's people to "love one another." The phrase "love one another" appears <u>32</u> times in John.

II. <u>Biblical Text — 1 John 4:7-21 (NIV, Bible Gateway)</u>:

<Slide> 7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.

<Slide> 13 This is how we know that we live in Him and He in us: He has given us of His Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

<Slide> 17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 19 We love because He first loved us. 20 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. 21 And He has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

<Prayer> "**Lord**, please move <u>me</u> out of the way. We're hungry to hear from you."

III. <u>Bible Teaching</u>:

1. <*Slide*> <u>God is the Source and Prototype for love</u>. (V7-12)

- "Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God." (V7)
- Of true love, the God of the Christian Story is both <u>Source</u> and <u>Prototype</u>.

- God is the Source. True love flows from our Creator.
- Isn't this why we humans are drawn so deeply to love?
- It is in God's very nature to love and true love is best demonstrated by God Himself. In Jesus, God delivers the Prototype for all loves.
- Note the text: "God is love" (8). Not 'love is God.'
- Careful we must be … for love itself can easily become an idol we bow to.
- APP — I think of our fixation with being, or falling 'in love.'
- Not that the impulse is entirely wrong, but if it becomes all-consuming, or my primary drive to find identity or fulfillment, and I'm willing to compromise my values for a taste of such human love, it becomes a giant pitfall. Thus it's vital we get correct the definition of love here.

- ***<Slide>*** Not to be confused with familial love or romantic love, and on a different plane by far, the most talked-about love in the Bible is …
    - A*gape* love—pure, wilful, intentional, self-sacrificing love that only comes from God.
- This brand of love was most clearly displayed 2000 years ago in an event that changed the world forever.
- The God of the Universe loved our broken, sinful world so much He sent His Son Jesus to earth. This action forms the signature message of the Christian Story. Even when we couldn't earn it, and certainly never deserved it, God the Son Jesus came and bridged the relational gap between holy God and sinful us, and won our forgiveness through His loving, "atoning sacrifice" (10) on the cross.
- God's motivation? Pure love for precious humanity.

- ***<Slide>*** Why the Bible says in cf. Romans 5:8, Q: "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- There is no greater gift of love possible than "God's only Son."
- In the ancient world there existed a commonly-held belief that you were only to offer love to those deemed 'worthy' of your love. Notion still exists today.
- Incredibly, Jesus came to die for us, not because we are all that loveable, worthy, or deserving of God's love. Like we sang earlier, Q: "All my shame was … met by [Your] mercy, [Lord]."

- So, if God's love is the prototype for love, it's a radical, countercultural, and heavy picture of self-sacrifice—even death for another's good.
- John goes on in v11, "Since God so loved us we also ought to love one another." God's love in Jesus provides the impetus for our love of others.
- Pastor and theologian John Stott says, Q: "No-one who has been to the cross and has seen God's immeasurable and unmerited love displayed there can go back to a life of selfishness." – Stott, p.166

2. <*Slide*> **The Spirit enables us to love one another. (V13-16a)**

- The kind of love John's calling Christ-followers to live out is not something we can muster up on their own strength.
- Which begs some questions, 'Can non-Christians love in the same way? 'What's unique about Christ-like love? Is all love love from God?'
- Glad you asked!
- In v15-16a, John says, "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us."
- I believe the Bible teaches that there is a unique kind of love that only Christ-followers can live out in this world.
- Now please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying Christians are innately 'better' than non-Christians—for even the Christ-like love of Christ-followers, this side of eternity, is never 100% pure.
- <*Slide*> But, there is an other-worldly love that comes from God and stands out amidst the feeding-the-homeless-donating-to-charity-good-karma-paying-it-forward pop-culture love of today.
- What separates Christian love from worldly love is that Christian love relies on, solely depends on, and flows from God alone.
- True Christian love gives God the glory and, points people to Jesus.
- ILL — Sadly many Christians and churches have moved away from this.
- Perhaps as a reaction to our overly-dogmatic pasts, many Christ-followers have settled for simply doing nice things while failing to point people to Jesus.
- And we've ignored the indwelling Spirit Who wishes both to connect us personally to the Father's Love and to enable us to impart the Father's Love to others!

3. <*Slide*> **God's love drives out fear and hatred. (V16b-21)**

- V16b-17: "Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment."
- Abiding in God's love gives us confidence in our standing before God.
- When we are assured of God's love for us, we cease to be afraid.
- Conversely, if we are <u>not</u> rooted in God's love, we can become fearful.
- Our head's on a swivel. We may fall prey to the voice of the enemy: 'God couldn't love <u>you</u>.' 'When <u>God</u> finds out what you've <u>done</u>, you're in big trouble.' 'If you walk into that church, God's gonna smite you!'

- ***<Slide>*** ILL — It's as we learn to live in <u>God's</u> perfect love that fear no longer enslaves us.
- Truthfully, much of my life this has been a battle. I'm very driven. I'm a rule-follower. I long to be right—get things right. I'm don't like correction. I'm afraid of punishment. And, I'm incredibly needy of love.
- Why, in my later adult years, it has been so <u>freeing</u> … to learn to abide more deeply, to rest in, to be <u>assured</u> by <u>God's</u> deep, deep love for me.
- Yes, God still sees my imperfections [more than anyone] <u>and</u> God still loves me more than I could ever imagine.
- And while this beautiful experience of God's love doesn't yet eradicate, it does <u>calm</u>, my deepest fears.

- ***<Slide>*** John knows the remedy for controversy and division in the church: Abide in God's love.
- With his final words of Ch4, John applies a stern rebuke.
- V20: "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."
- One can picture Pastor John poking around his church asking: Are your hearts really full of love for one another? Then, why do you become cool when you discover faults in others? Why do you distance yourself from people that annoy you? How do you treat people who are different than you? And, why is it you stick to yourself so often?
- And I think John would say, 'You need to deal with these problems!'

IV. <u>Life Applications</u>:

- Time to 'land the plane' now with a few more life applications.

A. *<Slide> Living in God's Incredible Love for Us. (V19)*

- To summarize what the God of the Christian Story offers to all humanity or what it means to be a Christian …
- If we were to boil it down to the fewest possible English words, 1 John 4:19 might cover it:
    - "We love because He [God the Son Jesus] first loved us."
- ***<Slide>*** ILL — 5 years ago, when my daughter Kyla married her husband Adam, she painted this verse, framed it, and placed it on stage here on their wedding day. Great verse to build a marriage around!
- I borrow from my charge to Kyla & Adam that special day:
    - Q: "In order for you to love each other well, you need to have given your hearts away <u>first</u> to Jesus. For the love of Jesus perseveres like no other. Root yourself deeply in it. Let <u>His love</u> flow through you <u>freely</u> to one another." — DPS, Nov 25/17
- APP — As humans we have been designed, hard-wired for love—to receive it [we need it], and to give it [we need to do that too!]
- ***<Slide>*** APP — Problem is: when we don't know we're loved by God and invited to live in God's incredible love for us, we are prone to try and take, or 'suck' love from wherever we can find it—often, from all the wrong sources.
- We may even catch ourselves on a precarious quest to find love through our success and accomplishments, or through sex and relationships.
- And, we become a drain—even a danger, to self and others.
- Much is made in our world these days about self-care, self-love, etc.
- Yet the Christian Story begins and ends with <u>God's</u> love; we are called to embrace God's love—and it's <u>God's</u> <u>love</u>, offered freely to us, that forms the foundation of our lives.
- Known as the "disciple whom <u>Jesus</u> loved" John's life was built on it.
- And we too are invited to experience God's love and root ourselves firmly in it. And as we do, we will find God's love carries us through all of life's ups and downs. And, on into eternity.

B. *<Slide> Loving And Being Loved By People Close to Us. (V17a)*

- APP — Perhaps the biggest test of how deep God's love has penetrated our lives is how we treat the people closest <u>to</u> us.

- Family members we live with, colleagues with whom we share an office, fellow congregants in church, teammates, classmates we have to deal with day after day … can be some of the most difficult people to love.
- Why is this so? Perhaps because there's more at stake, more expectations in these relationships. Or, maybe with the history and time invested, there's also more baggage and more comprehensive data in the bank on those people's flaws!
- Regardless, there's a lot riding on our ability to love those closest to us.
- John suggests: "Love is made complete among us [when we love one another] so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment."
- And John goes on with this incredible declaration: "[When we love one another] In this world we are like Jesus." (17a)
- How well we love others prepares the people of God for Christ's return.
- And, as Christ-followers, we get to mirror, represent, even be "like Jesus" to other people. In this way **loving one another** is extremely important work—and a massive privilege!

- ***<Slide>*** A primary avenue by which we experience God and His love is through the Body of Christ, the Church—in all its mess, and beauty.
- So, how can we more readily receive God's love through His people?
- Certainly this goes against our Lone-Ranger ideas about Christ-following: 'I'm self-sufficient. I'm not needy. I don't need help from anyone. I can do it myself.'
- Yet there have been countless times in my life when a Christian friend has called me up, sent a message, prayed for me, showed up at my house with something I needed, given me a gift or done something for me, to embody God's love for me … just when I've needed it most!

- ***<Slide>*** ILL/APP — Sadly many of our relationships have taken a hit during CoVID. And it will take some time to rebuild.
- While we can experience God's love through others via online platforms, there is still no substitute for being in the same room together.
- Some encouragement for you: Come early to church and talk to people. Stick around after church. Join a home group. Find a place to serve. Sign up for an event, or ministry, outside our Sunday Services.
- It requires effort, and some risk, to make an investment in church relationships, to put ourselves in closer proximity to others.

- Here's the point: Sometimes God's love feels distant, but when we allow ourselves to be loved in simple ways by other Christians, we can experience God's love supernaturally.

C. *<Slide> Loving One Another Makes God Visible Among Us! (V12)*

- God has always called His people to love one another.
- In cf. Deuteronomy 6, the Lord instructs Moses to call the Israelites both to … "Love the Lord your God with all your heart" (5) and … to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy." (11)
- Then in cf. Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus says: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."
- In v12, John weighs in, "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in <u>us</u> and His love is made complete in <u>us</u>."
- "Us." In his writing John so often uses the plural.
- When we love one another, Jesus shines through.
- And, like Jeremy said weeks back in a sermon, Q: "When we abide in <u>God's</u> love, the <u>unseen</u> God becomes <u>visible</u>." – DrJR, Feb 6/2022. Remarkable.

- ***<Slide>*** ILL — Ten years ago, Dave Ramsay walked into our church—homeless, broken, broke, struggling with mental health, and addiction—and full of shame.
- And he found a home right here in our church community. Literally!
- He lived in his car in the church parking lot for more than two years.
- Many of you had Ramo over for dinner, asked him to housesit for you, employed him as your gardener, befriended him, discipled him, helped him move, gave him a place to live.
- Four months ago, Ramo died.
- And last week, a few of us spent the day cleaning out our church bin at the top of the parking lot. It took over an hour to ferret to the back of the container through all the stuff Dave Ramsay had piled in there!
- Ramo was a hoarder. He had a dark side. His health caused him to fly off handle sometimes. He was stubborn. He was emotional. He struggled in relationships.
- At times, he was difficult to love and loving him <u>cost</u> us.

- But, it was totally worth it!
- While Ramo hurt me, I also saw God powerfully loving him through me bringing healing and transformation … through very little effort of my own—other than simply being there, showing interest, crying with him, praying with him, and pointing him to Jesus. It was glorious to watch!
- Collectively we loved Ramo. He fit in here.
- And today, I know Ramo is in eternity with Jesus as a result!

- ***<Slide>*** Author Michael Pahl says, Q: "This is the love Jesus taught. This is the love Jesus lived all the way to the cross. This is love: freely giving ourselves for others so that they might experience flourishing life together with us, even if we feel they don't deserve it, even when it hurts us to do so." — Pahl (May 8/17)
- ILL/APP — For the early church, its ethnic, socio-economic, and class diversity made loving one another a tremendous challenge.
- In the ancient world people like this did not associate with one another.
- Then, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, something supernatural took place—Christ-followers began to love one another beyond their divides: Jews and Greeks, men and women, slave and free, rich and poor.
- Baffled, onlookers took notice: 'See how they love one another.'

- ***<Slide>*** Most historians point to this factor, how the early Christians loved one another, as a primary reason the church grew and spread from a small gathering in Jerusalem all the way to the capital of the Roman Empire.
- Christ-followers simply embodied a different kind of love for one another —a love that was foreign to the outside world, compelling, and straight from the heart of Jesus.
- People of NSAC, may God grant us the ability to truly love one another— for the glory of Jesus, and the transformation of many lives. Amen.