

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
Sermon: "The fruit of the Spirit: from being loved to loving."
Scripture: Galatians 5:16-23, 1 John 4:7-21
Rev. Steve Filyk
September 20, 2026

Have you ever wondered what the Beatles meant
When they sang 'all you need is love'?

You may be thinking, "Well, that's obvious."
But consider what John Lennon said about his own song
in a 1969 interview:

"When I was singing about all you need is love,
I was talking about something I hadn't experienced...
I had experienced love for people in gusts
and love for things and trees and things like that.
But I hadn't experienced what I was singing about.

It's like anything.
You sing about it first or write about it first
and find out what you were talking about after."
[Davis, M. (2025, July 4). The Anthemic Beatles Song John Lennon Said He Wrote "About
Something I Hadn't Experienced." Retrieved from American Songwriter website:
<https://americansongwriter.com/the-anthem-beatles-song-john-lennon-said-he-wrote-about-something-i-hadnt-experienced/>]

We use the word "love" all the time.
We sing about it, we talk about it,
we say we love people, we love our families,
we love our favourite foods.

But what do we actually mean when we say, "love"?
It's an important question.

In today's Bible lesson, the Apostle John talks about love.
He isn't simply talking about whatever we happen to mean by the word.
He's talking about a Divine love that is revealed to us in Jesus.
He is talking about a love that fills us
And changes us and then flows through us to others.

Opening Hymn: O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus
Choruses: Hallelujah (Your love is amazing) & Holy Spirit
Song after sermon: Brother, sister, let me serve you #635
Closing Hymn: Lead on, O King eternal #742 or Love Divine, All Loves
Excelling #371

Today's reading from the first letter of John
Is, in the words of Sesame Street, brought to you by the word LOVE.
"The word 'love', or some form of it, occurs no fewer
than twenty-seven times in these fifteen verses. [NT *The Early Christian Letters For
Everyone: James, Peter, John, and Judah* Wright 158]

"Dear friends, let us love one another,
for love comes from God.
Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." 1 John 4:7

Love we are told, is a characteristic of God.
Love we are told, finds its beginning in God.
And this Divine love also flows from those who know God.

When John says "God is love," he's not saying that love is all that God is.
Scripture tells us that God is also holy, just, righteous and faithful.
Nor is John saying that whatever we happen to call "love"
must therefore be Divine.

Our culture gives us many different pictures of love:
romantic love, friendship, acceptance, affection, desire.
But John doesn't leave us to define love for ourselves.
God reveals what this love is:

"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."
This is love: not that we loved God,
but that he loved us
and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."
For John, divine love is supremely expressed
as the gift and sacrifice of Jesus.
And it continues to be expressed in Jesus' followers
as much as we demonstrate

Costly and selfless love to each other.

And notice something else this love:
it doesn't wait for us to love God first. It takes the initiative.
"This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us".
God's love doesn't begin with our worthiness.
It begins with God's loving character.

When we begin to grasp this undeserved love,
it has a radical impact on us.
More than just making us feel loved,
It transforms the way that we love others.
God's love doesn't simply fill an empty container.
It takes root in us—and by the Spirit it begins to bear fruit.
And the first fruit Paul names is love.

That's where our other reading comes in.
Paul calls love a "fruit of the Spirit."
In other words, this isn't simply something Christians
are commanded to manufacture through greater effort.
It is something God's Spirit produces in people who belong to Christ.

Love blossoms.
And not just any kind of love, but divine love
Love that takes initiative, that is selfless,
that offers costly attention and care.

We don't sacrifice in order to make God love us.
We sacrifice because, in Christ,
we have already been loved.
It is only after this experience
Of God's love that John's call to action makes sense.

"Dear friends, since God so loved us,
we also ought to love one another.
No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another,
God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. [1 John 4:11-12]

When we encounter God's love in Jesus
And receive it in our hearts
God's Spirit begins a supernatural process of transformation
Whereby the same sort of love
Is produced within us and displayed among us.
And this is how God continues to be made known.
In the words of Tom Wright
"...people don't really know who 'God' is—
until they see that revealed in the life of Christians.
Until, that is, "his love is completed in us.'
What God launched decisively in Jesus,
he wants to complete in and through us." (NT Wright 159)

Sometimes in our bitterness or self-preoccupation
we decide that others are undeserving of this love.
They may have insulted us or otherwise offended us.
So we choose to withhold this gift from them.

But John tells us that those who have received God's love can't withhold it.
If you believe, you will love.
If you aren't loving one another,
you aren't believing in Jesus.

You can't split the two
for belief-in-Jesus-and-love-one-another
Is ultimately a single command. [see Christopher J H Wright *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit* 29]

John gives us a very serious warning here.
Faith in Jesus and love for one another cannot ultimately be separated.
If we have received God's love,
that love will be revealed in the way we treat other people.

That doesn't mean Christians love perfectly.

We don't.

We still get angry. We still hold grudges.
 We still avoid difficult people. We still fail.
 But it does mean that the direction of our lives begins to change.
 The Spirit keeps teaching us to love
 where once we would have refused to love.

PAUSE

Have you been withholding love from someone in particular?

Maybe it's the person who irritates you every time you see them.
 Maybe it's someone in your family who has hurt you.
 Maybe it's the neighbour you would rather avoid.
 Maybe it's someone at work who takes credit for things you did.
 Maybe it's simply the person sitting beside you in church
 who you haven't spoken to in months.

Who is that person?
 Keep their image in your mind for a moment.

What would it look like for God's love to flow toward that person
 not because they deserve it,
 and not because you expect anything back,
 but because God has loved you that way?

Perhaps as you think about that person,
 you realize just how difficult this kind of love can be.
 Maybe you know what you ought to do,
 but you don't feel like doing it.
 Maybe you've tried before and failed.
 Maybe you've been a Christian for years
 and still find some people very difficult to love.

So how do we grow in demonstrating this kind of love?
 A lot of it comes down to keeping close
 To the God who first loved us.
 If we want to see this love grow in our own loves

We "must saturate our minds with Scriptures
 that describe love and show its importance to us...
 pray for the Holy Spirit to apply his word to our hearts and to our daily lives...
 [and then commit ourselves to] obey." [Jerry Bridges *The Fruitful Life* 58]

PAUSE

Some of you have been to the Holy Land.
 Almost all of us know a little about its geography.
 Consider how the Jordan River feeds the Dead Sea.
 The Dead Sea receives the waters of the Jordan,
 but it has no river flowing out of it.
 Water comes in, but nothing flows onward.

This captures a danger for Christians.
 We can spend our whole lives receiving.
 We hear sermons. We read Scripture.
 We come to communion. We sing about God's love.
 We experience God's forgiveness. We receive God's grace.

And yet God's love can stop with us.

But that's not what the Spirit is doing in us.
 God's love comes in—and God intends that love to flow out.

It flows into our homes.
 It flows into our friendships.
 It flows toward difficult people.
 It flows toward people who can't repay us.
 It flows in forgiveness, service, generosity, patience and practical care.

And remember where this love comes from.
 We aren't being asked to produce something that God has never given us.
 We are being invited to pass on what we have already received.
 We love because he first loved us.

The question isn't simply, "Have I received God's love?"

The question is: "Is God's love now flowing through me?"
May it be so. Amen.