

Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds; by the power of your Spirit

That we may hear your living word; as scriptures are read and interpreted. Amen.

Loved to love

In our text this morning John the writer of these three letters provides the church with what I would call the theology of love. Here we journey into the most profound analysis of Christian love in the New Testament surpassing the even better known 1 Corinthians 13. In his first book he had defined God's love in a way that would become the most famous and well loved verse in the Bible John 3:16 "***For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son , so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life***". Here in 1 John 4 he develops the concept of God's love even further.

It is very interesting that in the first book St. John 3:16 he begins with God's initiative- ***For God so loved....*** yet in our lesson this morning it begins with the human response. Verse 7 "***Beloved, let us love one another***" Last week Brian spoke about the weakness in how the NIV tends to interpret the original language of the text and I must add that I feel the same way too. For example, the NIV introduces the text – '***Dear friend***' while the NRSV continues with the old word '***Beloved***' used the older translations of the Bible.

I raise this point because I believe that the word '***Beloved***' is fundamental to the concept that John wants to bring to his readers. '***Beloved***' suggests a kind of belonging to a special group of the loved. These are persons who have been loved, persons who have experienced the love and grace of God. The word '***Beloved***' then ties the instruction to love one another, to the communion of faith and by extension to us as a church today.

The second part of the statement "for love comes from God" seems to be a response to the question why should we love? The writer uses this instruction ***beloved let us love one another*** as the thesis on which he builds the analysis of the love of God.

This morning I will highlight some of the main points of this analysis. Firstly, we as the children of God belong to the elite group called the beloved. There is a tendency in this modern world to make Christians feel small, weird, unimportant and out of place. The presence of evil and the sufferings and pain that we experience cause us to question our own faith, but the text calls us *beloved* and confirms our special relationship with God and assures us of his response when we cry *abba Father*.

Then there is the Christian imperative to love, as persons who have experienced the love of God ourselves. As members of the beloved family we have a Christian responsibility to love. This is not something that should be done; it is something that must be done. Historians suggest that this text is coming at a time of great divisions in the early church. Like every other organisation they struggled with their relationships (the quarrels between the disciples are well documented) the church was moving from Jewish communities into the unfamiliar Gentile communities bringing the Jews into contact with unfamiliar cultures and religious practices. It was like our church today especially in our home Canada when we come face to face with different persons, different cultures and practices yet even in these circumstances the *'beloved'* must love each other.

Secondly, John seems to be aware of the challenge that loving each other presents to individuals, even Christians. It is not easy to love. He seems also to be aware that the ability to love was not a learnt behaviour that came through education or socialisation *"love comes from God"* therefore *"everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."*

The ability to love then comes from God it is a work of the spirit and can only be accomplished by those who have been born of God and who and those who know God. The apostle is tying the ability to love to the life and work of Jesus Christ. It is through Christ that we are born again. It is through His work on Calvary that we received our new birth and it is through Christ that we enter into a lasting relationship with God- that's how we know him. It is in experiencing and knowing God that we learn to love. It goes back to what John had taught in St John 3 16. God loves therefore he gave.

The third lesson we note is just how the nature God's love. ***"This is love not that we love God but He loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."*** God's love was not hinged to any human condition, it was not a reaction to any love shown to him, rather it was initiated to those who showed no affection to him in the first place. He gave his only son made the ultimate sacrifice for a world that expressed no interest in him. For John the revelation of Jesus his life death and resurrection is clear demonstration of the love of God and to love each other the only reasonable response. (the hymn When I survey the wondrous cross ----did ere such love and sorrow meet or thorns compose so rich a crown)

What does all of this mean to us at Brentwood this morning as we seek to nourish souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ? Well it is quite simple, as members of the beloved family we ought to love each other. In our world there is all kinds of enlightened self interests parading in the disguise of love. We see powerful countries and companies pretending to love weaker and poorer ones although the concern is only for their resources. The high rate of divorce is based on the fact that many marriages are not based on love in the first place.

But as members of the beloved family love is based on our relationship with God when we think of what he did for us loving each other is our natural response. This is how we demonstrate that God lives in us and that we are his children.

The ability to love without a cause is the mark of the children of God this is how we show the world that we are in covenant relationship with God because as John puts it you cannot say you love God and do not love your brothers and sisters.

The message rooted in the text this morning is that we are ***loved to love*** God loves us that we might become a loving agent in this world. The beloved must love in return. That is what our communities are waiting for.

Amen