

Being the Church at Brentwood

What Love Is

**Ps 23 & 1 John 3:16-24
(Hymns – 248, 635, 706, 722)**

April 29, 2012

Love, according to John, is what God did for us in Jesus Christ.
It's that simple.

To understand what love really is,
we are encouraged to remember yet again the story of the Gospel.

Here are the highlights in John's narrative with John's metaphors and images.
Everything in the story revolves around a meaningful relationship with God,
what John calls the Logos or the Word.

That is the central thread of the plot in this story.

The Relationship is the desired goal.

It has been distorted and discarded by human beings
with the result that they are living in darkness,
blind to the presence and power of the light of God's love.

Love is God's most basic quality.

Love of humanity is God's most basic passion.

Love of a reconciled Relationship with God's most beloved creatures.

The initiative in re-establishing this original Relationship
comes from God.

Humans have become convinced they can go it alone,
that they do not need the Relationship with the Source of their being
to live full and flourishing lives.

They have become blind and deaf to God's presence
in every breath of their lives.

This attitude on the part of humans
leaves them in the darkness and despair of self-sufficiency,
cut off from God and each other and even their best selves.

And the real tragedy is
that humans don't recognize or actually prefer the darkness.

Into this dull and depressing world comes the light of God's love
in the flesh, full of grace and truth.

God takes flesh and dwells among us.

Throughout the story in John's Gospel,
he uses ordinary things and experiences
to point beyond to the presence and power of God –
water, bread, shepherds and sheep, vines and fruit, and light.
The ordinary is infused with and brought to flourishing life by
the presence of power of God's love.

Jesus acts in miraculous ways
to show the power and purpose of God's loving desire
to re-establish the Relationship with his beloved children,
children he encourages to mature into friends.

The miraculous acts of love are followed by conversations
that explain the love of God revealed in the miracles.

The issue is never whether the miracles are true,
but what they reveal about the God who is acting in love.

The most prolonged and powerful discourse
is recorded in chapters 13-17.
It takes place, in John's telling of the story,
on the night of Jesus' arrest
for being a threat to the religious powers of his Jewish community.
These conversations focus on God's love
and what it means to be disciples –
learners and followers –
of that love.

As we concluded at our Bible study last Friday evening,
at the heart of Christian discipleship
is loving God with our whole beings and our neighbours as ourselves.

But there is a cost to living this kind of love
among humans who prefer darkness to light.
There is a cost to living this kind of love
among humans whose power and privilege is threatened by this particular light.
There is a cost to living this kind of love
in service of the Commonwealth of God.

The initial cost to God in Jesus Christ was death.
But in the darkness of the tomb
the ultimate miracle happened.

The light overcame the darkness.

Love conquered fear.

Life defeated death.

The story concludes with a powerful plea
to find your true, God-given self
by following Jesus
in the ways he loved God, loved others, and loved himself.

This congregation welcomes people
to join them in that journey of discipleship,
of following Jesus in the ways of love.
We have been found by and reconciled to the true Source
of life and love in Jesus Christ.
We want to share that gift,
and everything that flows from it,
with others.

We do that in worship, in learning,
in fellowship, and in service.
All four of these ways of being
infuse us with and help us express the love of God
in everything that we do.

A good example of the joy and contentment these ways of living bring
is the World Food Potluck we had last night here at the church.
More than 40 people gathered
to share a wonderful banquet of dishes from our various cultural roots.
My only regret is that I did not remember the promise I made to Dorothy
when we were planning the evening.
Not only had I promised to bring a version of the Nana's Scotch Broth,
but I had also promised to wear my kilt.
I showed up in jeans!
Next fall, when I hope we do this again, I will wear the kilt.

But this captures wonderfully, dare we say miraculously,
one of the key themes in John's story of God's love in Jesus Christ.
We take the ordinary and discover there the presence and power of God's love.
Ordinary welcome and hospitality over lovingly prepared food
brings the light of God's love into this world of dark, dread, and death.

That what being the church really means -
darkness, dread, and death defeated by the light and love of God
and human beings being reconciled with the true Source of their flourishing.

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