



Catalog No. 1805

1 John 3:11-18

Fifth Message

Andrew Drake

January 15, 2012

LOVING LIKE JESUS

SERIES: *WHAT GREAT LOVE*

What is love? If we tried to understand love only by what we read in the paper and see on TV, we would be convinced that love is nothing more than the motivating force to buy everything from mouthwash to diamond earrings. If we were modern-day philosophers and high-tech truth-seekers we would of course ask our smart-phones, "What is love"? I did just that with my iPhone and this is the definition I received: "love is a strong, positive emotion of attraction and affection."

Is that what love is? Really? An emotion of attraction? If that's true, then love really is easy. Love is selfish. Love is all about me, what I want, what I'm attracted to, fulfilling what I desire. I love my dog, I love my car, I love music and art, I love banana cream pie.

The word love can be so easily distorted and misused. This misrepresentation of love has been around for centuries. That is why, as we looked at last week, when John tells his readers that God is love he does not give a verbal definition but gives a living example. We know what love is because God sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ that we might live through him, and he gave us his Spirit that we might live in him and he in us (1 John 4:10-19) each and every day of our life.

What wonderfully good news that is, but is that the complete journey of love, or is there something more? At the end of our text last week we were given a strong hint when John says "*We love because he first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). So we see that love from God is not only a gift we receive and rely on, but also a gift we share with others.

And so this brings us to the second theme of 1 John that I would like us to reflect on this morning: What does it look like to love like Jesus? What does it mean to love one another?

Our text begins with a summary statement from John.

For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. (1 John 3:11)

John reminds his readers that the message to love one another has always been foundational to what it means to be children of God. The message to love one another comes from the very heart of God for his people, and is highlighted by Jesus when he was asked which is the greatest commandment in the law.

Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and

the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matt. 22:37-40)

Following Jesus' lead, promoting love is a well-known hallmark in all of John's writings. Again and again he affirms the importance of love. A key reason why this theme is raised in this first letter of John is because he was pastoring a church in crisis. Certain members had left the church, proclaiming a false gospel, and were causing serious controversy and division.

With such a betrayal by those they once considered their brothers, it would be easy for those in the church to harbor hatred within their heart. Not only that, but how are they to rebuild trust amongst themselves and nurture once again a church community of mutual love among brothers and sisters in Christ?

To answer that question John gives two contrasting examples. The first example is Cain, who illustrates what love is not; the second example is Jesus, who illustrates the true essence of love. John begins with the negative example.

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. (1 John 3:12-13)

The account of Cain and Abel is found in Genesis 4.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. (Genesis 4:2b-8)

At the end of harvest time each brother brought a tribute to the Lord. Their offerings reflected their heart. Abel brought his very best, "*the fat portions of the firstborn.*" His offering represented a heart fully devoted to God and was therefore a gift of true worship. Cain's tribute was not from the first

fruits of his crops, and therefore not his very best. His offering represented a heart not fully devoted to God and was therefore not true worship. God looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. This made Cain very angry.

Instead of leaving Cain to stew in his anger and resentment, God approaches him and invites him to do what is right. But instead of ruling over and letting go of his anger by responding with a repentant heart, Cain followed in the footsteps of the devil. Like the evil one who is described as a thief that “*comes to steal and kill and destroy*” (John 10:10) and also a lion that prowls around “*looking for someone to devour*” (1 Peter 5:8), Cain attacked his brother and killed him.

And what was his motive? John tells us that Cain killed Abel not because the actions of Abel were wicked, but because they were righteous. Why is righteousness such a threat? In John’s gospel we get a clearer understanding,

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. All those who do evil hate the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. (John 3:19-20).

Those who live in the darkness want to extinguish the light that exposes their sin.

This is why John, in an effort to prepare and strengthen his flock in the midst of their current persecution, says, “Don’t be surprised if the world hates you.” This is exactly what Jesus warned his followers:

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. (John 15:18-19).

Even today as we enter this three-day weekend filled with remembrance and football, we can clearly see that whether it is a Baptist minister’s dedication to the dream of equal rights for everyone created in God’s image, or an NFL quarterback who publicly displays his faith on a football field, there will always be haters of those whose life and light do not belong to the world.

Such hatred is the way of Cain. It is the way of selfishness, darkness, and death. John continues:

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates a fellow believer is a murderer, and you know that no murderers have eternal life in them. (1 John 3:14-15).

Expressing the love of God is evidence of the presence of the life of God. Those who do not love, however, reveal that they have not experienced the new life of Christ and therefore remain “in death.”

John Calvin once wrote, “We wish him to perish whom we hate.” Anyone who harbors anger and hatred toward another, for all intents and purposes seeks their destruction. In a very real sense they are committing murder in their heart.

This parallels Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount where he said:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. (Matt. 5:20-22a).

Our inner motives and attitudes weigh as seriously as our actions.

Bitterness, jealousy, resentment, and hatred can lead not only to the physical murder of the body, but through gossip, innuendo, and lies it can also lead to the destruction of someone’s life-long reputation and standing within a community.

We may not believe we have ever been inclined to murder someone, but this text encourages us to search our heart as we relate to one another. Is there anyone in your life you are tempted to hate? Put another way, is there anyone you are jealous of and competitive with? Anyone you want to ‘fall’ so that you could ‘rise’? Anyone you wish would just go away?

This is the way of Cain, and when we see its ugliness within us, however briefly, we must go to the Lord and repent of our sin. It is there in the presence of his overwhelming mercy and forgiveness that we can let go of the burden of our anger and cling instead to God’s love. May the Lord help us be attentive to those times when we harbor an attitude or motive that brings destruction and death, in all its forms, to those around us.

Cain provides a negative example of life within the family. He did not demonstrate love for his brother. But now John offers a totally different example. Jesus demonstrates what true love is.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another. If any one of you has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in you? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18)

We know what love is because Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. Jesus said to his disciples, “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Those weren’t just pious words, they were the way he lived his life. Just as Jesus expressed his love by laying down his outer garment before he washed his disciples feet (John 13:4), so too out of love he “laid down” his very life for us that we might have eternal life.

And Jesus exhorted his disciples to live the same way, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater

love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). As Christ loved us and laid down his life for us, so we must do for one another.

To ‘lay down’ literally means to divest oneself of something, to lay down what we have so that another might benefit. This is the attitude of Jesus Christ described in our scripture reading this morning: “in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (Philippians 2:3-8).

What does this laying down look like? It is more than just a “positive emotion of attraction and affection,” that’s for sure. John says that the laying down of our life is not so much in giving of our physical life in a single supremely heroic and selfless act, but in our day-to-day living as we give of ourselves and our possessions to those in need.

If we do not love as God loves, if we do not give of what we have to the need that we see, it is evidence that the love of God is not within us. Love that fails to take action is nothing but empty words.

This truth strikes deeply to my core. I am all too aware of the wide gap between my profession of love and my expression of it. It is easy to sing and talk about love, but it is quite another to actually love. How do we love like Jesus? How can we love with such generosity and sacrifice? We must go back to the words of John we looked at last week:

We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19).

We are not born with the ability to love like Jesus. On our own we can’t do it. We love because we are filled with God’s love. He has sent his Son, through whom we receive life, and this life is present and active within us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. As we live in God’s love, as we drink deeply from his love that has so extravagantly been poured into us we are moved to share that love with those around us.

It is wonderful to respond generously in the spur of the moment to the need that we see, but we are also invited to plan ahead for opportunities to love in the future. As the Apostle Paul says, “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor. 9:7).

Moved by this truth very early in our marriage, Amy and I added a line item in our family budget titled “others.” It is our attempt to set aside some money so that we can be ready to love others cheerfully, not reluctantly, when we see a need. It has given us a great deal of freedom in this area and I highly recommend it to you.

It is easy to be overwhelmed with the need of so many across the world that it can easily freeze us from any action at all. I’d like to encourage you to simply invite the Lord to open your eyes and your heart to the people around you, to really see them. There is absolutely nothing wrong with contributing to a “cause” that helps people, but we must not forget to

pay special attention to the individuals we see up close and personal as we walk each step of our journey of faith.

May the Lord slow us all down so that we can see the physical, emotional, spiritual, and financial needs of those around us, and respond quickly and generously when we do. I know you to be a very loving community of faith because I have been the recipient of your love and generosity many times. I thank the Lord for you and pray that you will not grow weary in doing good.

It’s at this point in my sermon that I might illustrate what it means to love like Jesus by bringing up the Parable of the Good Samaritan or I might talk about how the early church put this truth into action by “selling their possessions and goods, giving to anyone as he had need” (Acts 2:45). But all around you is inspiration and evidence of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ laying down their lives for the blessing of others. The artwork and artifacts on display in the auditorium remind us of the ongoing work of our missionaries who are laying down their lives in order to bless others.

A wonderful example of loving others closer to home is my dear sister Kathy Woodward. Kathy and I go way back. Her daughters came through the high school group when I was the high school pastor. Kathy was on my team the very first few years that we went down to Mexicali. She has demonstrated the love of God, not just with words but in action and truth for as long as I have known her. Her faithfulness, generosity, and love at CityTeam and other ministries have touched thousands of lives. I’d like you to hear her story:

First of all I want to say thank you for the help you all give us as PBCC missionaries. It is what keeps us going and encourages us. Many of you receive newsletters from missionaries and you pray for us and donate funds and this fuels our engines, so thank you.

Many years ago my children were in a musical, *Down By the Creekbank* by Dottie Rambo, and they sang a song that has stuck with me through the years. The lyrics say,

**Little barefoot boy running through the land
What you got in that basket in your hand?
There are 5000 people waiting to be fed
Hungry for the water and the living bread.
To sum it all up you simply divide
Watch the Master’s love just multiply
Add a little kindness subtract all the doubt
And watch it all work out.**

The song goes on to challenge you to give it away, whatever is in your basket. Remember the little boy who brought his basket to Jesus? He just had a little bit of fish and some loaves, and when they say “loaves” I picture biscuits. This wasn’t a big loaf from Safeway, this was a little boy’s lunch. Over 20 years ago I had the opportunity to go to CityTeam and take my basket. I looked in my basket and it didn’t seem there was much in there. Just a little lunch for me. But God opened my heart when I met a few people that were in great need of being loved. So I stayed and taught an art class once a week and then eventually, about 19 years ago, the director said that CityTeam really needed a school. I looked in my basket and there was no school there! The director said to me, “Kathy, you used to be a teacher; you make

a school!" So, I said, "God, I can't make a school!" and God said back, "Yeah, you can make a school."

Well, God put a school together. Last year we had 280 adults in recovery attending 5 schools in 5 cities. We have people who don't read and we have people with PhD's who come to our school. It is like a one-room schoolhouse – it meets students where they are and tries to help fill what their need is. Romans 12:2 is our key verse, reminding us to give ourselves as a living sacrifice. I like that word "living." I'm not much in to dying for people. I guess I might do that once, but it is nice that God calls us to be a living sacrifice. Paul goes on to say that we are a living sacrifice by the "renewing of your minds." When we get people who are in addiction, we have minds that aren't working. They are sorely, sorely broken. Our learning centers are places where they can come and get their mind back in working order.

This week, I was in Portland training a new teacher and I was able to work with one of the students there. He was a swarthy old guy who, if you met him on the street, you'd want to cross over to the other side. He looked dangerous. He didn't smile much, but he'd been sitting in the learning center kind of on his own, so I asked him if he would be okay if we reassessed him. He did it fairly willingly, and we said, "Look! Your brain is starting to remember!" He looked at us and he said, "For the first time in my life I feel like maybe I can get my GED." He is 57 years old but he needs it.

The things we see happen at CityTeam are amazing. I don't always think of it as loving when I make a guy go through pain, but sometimes that is loving. It is just what he needs. I had a friend, I'll call him Al, who came in and you could see by the way he walked that he didn't have a lot of confidence. When he sat in a chair he slunk down, shoulders hunched over, and you just wanted to lift him up. Well he told me that he had never done anything but fail in school and everyone called him "big, stupid Al." Now all of our people are not like that. We have college graduates who come through and they are brilliant. But they also need to learn how to stand up a little straighter and allow God to lift them up. I saw Al this week in passing, and he walked down the street and waved at me with a big grin that looks like it's hooked on each ear, and he says, "I'm in training! I am supporting my kids, I'm getting paid, I'm holding down a job!" And he knows he can read. It is so exciting to see!

There is a line in a book called *The Shack*, which some of you might know. It is a fun book to read because it takes God right out of a box if you had him in one. The line is "learning to live loved." That is what I have had to do – learn to live loved with the love God has for me so that I can give it out.

I thank you all for loving us, the missionaries here. All of you are like the little boy. You all have a basket too, and if you stop and look in your basket, it probably doesn't look like much. But in the Master's hands, what's in that basket can multiply beyond your wildest dreams.

May the Lord our God make your love increase and overflow for each other and may your light shine so brilliantly that the world may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. To him be all the glory now and forevermore! Amen.

1. John Calvin; Calvin's *New Testament Commentaries; Gospel According to St. John 11-21: The First Epistle of John*; Wm. B. Erdman's Publishing CO. Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1994; page 276

© 2012 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino