

To love one another is sometimes hard to do. For there's so much not to love! After all, what are we to do with the irritating behaviors and attitudes we find in each other?! But even harder is choosing to be loved. Indeed, when we look in the mirror, we often don't feel very lovable. This morning we're going to talk about what it means to be loved by God and how we're going to transfer that love onto one another.

## OPENING PRAYER

### 1<sup>st</sup> JOHN 4:16-21

**So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. <sup>17</sup> By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.**

It feels good to be loved, to be accepted for who we are, unconditionally. Of course, the world tells us that we must strive for such acceptance, improving ourselves, making ourselves more lovable, that if we were only skinnier, more clever, more successful we might be worthy of love.

Unfortunately, the church often follows the ways of the world. We impose on one another all kinds of expectations, and the love of Christ which is supposed to permeate our spirits seems to allude us.

And this is why following the world does not work: We have a whole in our heart that only God can fill. Up here (in our head) we know how we should live, but unless this (our heart) is made whole by the Lord, we can never change.

Consider what John wrote in his letter. The passage begins, "**So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us**" (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:16). "**To know**" is about having understanding, like knowing the difference between a dog and a rattlesnake. It's about information, about what's going on here (in the head). But John also said we "**have come... to believe.**"

**“To believe”** is synonymous with faith, that is, to be persuaded that God’s love is real and that it’s for me. “Belief” is about what’s going on in here (in the heart).

So what is it we know and believe about **“the love God has for us”**? Consider the 3-persons of the Holy Trinity. You KNOW God your Father in heaven created you. But do you BELIEVE that he did this out of love, that he formed you, he shaped you, he molded you as you are because he loves you? Friends in Christ, know this, believe this, for the God the Father created you in love for a purpose.

As regards Jesus, you KNOW he was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried, and that on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day he rose from the grave. But do you BELIEVE he did this for you out of love? Brothers and sisters in the Lord, know this, believe this, for the Lord has saved you out of love for a purpose.

And finally, you KNOW the Holy Spirit, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Holy Trinity, lives in you, that he visits you in your conscience through the Word. But do you BELIEVE he will never leave you nor forsake you because he loves you? Know this, believe this, for the Lord has preserved you in love for a purpose.

That’s the beginning of our journey in God’s love. St. John continued, writing, **“By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment” (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:16).**

If you were a soldier well-trained for combat, then you would have confidence on the battlefield. If you were a well-trained athlete, then you would have confidence when you went out onto the field to play. So too if we know and believe God has forgiven us for all of our sins and has given us the gift of eternal life, we have the confidence we need to face anything, even death, for we know that nothing on earth nor in heaven can steal away this gift from us.

St. John wrote, **“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love” (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:18).**

I’m thinking of the action movies with the lone hero who is so strong, so smart, so clever that nothing can overpower him. Rambo and the Terminator, X-men and Iron Man, Dirty Harry and the Duke, Superman, and Spiderman! They take on entire armies single-handedly! What courage! What strength! What FEARLESSNESS! But this is all make-believe.

But the one thing we know and believe which is not make-believe, which is as true as the sky is blue is the Cross of Jesus and his resurrection from the grave. And we know and we believe with absolute certainty that he will come again! Alleluia! There is no fear in that. But there's only love, the love of God for you and me.

My friends, you may feel unlovable for all the dastardly things you've done, but that is a mirage created by the devil to make you doubt God's love for you and to steal away your joy. But God doesn't see the things of your past; he doesn't keep a list. But he sees you as his beloved.

The last point in this reading from 1<sup>st</sup> John is the anticipated outcomes of this work of the Lord in our lives. Because we know and believe in the love God has for us, and because we are absolutely fearless as we live in this love, we are prepared, we are qualified, we are well-trained to receive this instruction. St. John wrote, **“this commandment we have from him: Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:21).**

Love begins and ends with God. When we know and believe in the love God has for us in our minds and in our hearts despite our inadequacies, we can love other people despite their inadequacies. When we know and believe that God loves us as his son, his daughter, and that he has created us, saved us, and preserved us for a purpose, then we have something to share with others who too were created by God for a purpose.

This week let us not only know about God's love in our heads but let us strive to believe it in our hearts.

This week let us share this same love with the people in our lives.

And this week let us find opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.