

1 John, 4, 7 to 21 9.30 am.

Sermon given on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2021

### The theme is Abiding in God's love

1 John 4: 7 to 21, in a nutshell tells us that God is love, possibly the most profound phrase in the New Testament, and that all things which are good are driven by love, that we imitate God only when we love; so, understanding what John has written is vital in this world which is so often driven by hate.

There are three main categories of love; there is Philia love which is best describe as affectionate love without romantic attraction normally found between close friends and family members.

There is Eros love which is of course romantic love normally found between a man and a woman; and there is Agape love best described as selfless love, the highest level of love we can offer.

Agape love is given without any expectations of receiving anything in return. Offering Agape love is a decision to spread love in any circumstances, including destructive or aggressive situations.

We show Agape love when we dedicate our lives to improving the life of others, when we exercise Christian giving of our talents, our time, and our money without any expectations of receiving anything in return.

St. John in our reading is talking about Agape love, which is selfless love, the highest form of love we can offer other people.

In the first verse 7 of our reading John declares that love is from God; our capacity to love is dependent on God, because our love comes from God, therefore there is no other source of love other than from God.

My sermon today will only be understood by our acceptance that God and only God is the source of all the love that is in the world.

In verse 8 John goes even further, John declares that 'God is love'; now this is the first time that the phrase 'God is love', appears in the whole Bible, and it appears near the end of the New Testament.

When Peter declared that Jesus was the Son of God, Jesus told him that this truth did not come from man but directly from my Father, and the same applies to John, John's declaration that God is love came directly from God.

So, in the very first two verses of our reading John is exhorting us to love one another, because God is love, and therefore the more we exercise unconditional love the closer we will get to God, we are never nearer to God than when we give our love unconditionally.

And John goes on to say in verse 8 that the opposite is true, that if we do not love our neighbours and put their interests and needs before our own, then we will separate ourselves from God, and consequently will not get to know him properly, and the second part of verse 8 makes it plain, when John adds, "For God is love".

It was through love that God created our beautiful world for us to live in, it was through love that God created humankind in his image and gave us the ability to love, so that we could get to know him and to love him, because he loves us and wants a relationship with us.

And in verse 9 John tells us that God's love for us was revealed afresh by God when he sent his own Son into the world to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins so that we might live a full and creative life today and beyond physical life.

God's love for his Son is only equalled by the Son's love for his Father, which is such a close bond that in chapter 10 verse 30 as recorded in John's gospel, Jesus' love for his Father could only be expressed by Jesus by saying "The Father and I are one."

God made a huge act of love by sending his Son to die for us, and Christ made a huge act of love for us by being a willing sacrifice so that we, through our faith and trust in his love, may be freed from our sins and have eternal life with Christ.

Verses 10 and 11 says that since God loves all of us then we should also love one another.

We have received unselfish love from God, now God wants us to give unselfish love to one another. It is only right that we should do so because love is a gift to us to be passed on to others, as God passed it on to us.

In verse 12 John writes that no one has seen God, I'm reminded of what God told Moses in Exodus chapter 33 verse 20 when God said to Moses, "For no one shall see my face and live."

But now we can see an image of God in Jesus Christ because as Jesus told Philip in John's gospel at chapter 14 verse 9, "He who has seen me has seen the Father", and we have a clear view of him in the New Testament.

In verse 13, John wrote that through love we abide in God and God abides in us because God has given us his Holy Spirit to live in us.

And it is God the Holy Spirit that guides Christians day by day, and it is God the Holy Spirit which lives in us and to whom we can turn to at any time, whether we want to thank him for something or ask his advice about something.

God the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in our lives and knowing that, we can be assured that our relationship with God is real and personal to each of us; we have not somehow earned God's Holy Spirit or achieved it through some personal act or initiative. The Holy Spirit of God is yet another gift of love from God.

And verses 15 and 16 sums it up where John wrote, "God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God."

Now the word confess can also mean declare or assert, which changes a rather passive sentence to an assertion or declaration that Jesus is the Son of God, and God will stand by those who stand by him.

Now there is a lesson to be learnt from this, because in this secular country it is so much easier to go with the flow rather than stand up for God.

A few months before my retirement Alan, now bishop of Buckingham, asked me to consider ordination, and my unspoken immediate reaction was 'No', I want to retire, but on reflection I know I made the right decision, and this is now my 20<sup>th</sup> year since ordination.

God calls all of us in many ways, and if we stand up for God, if we answer his call, God will stand up for us and equip us for whatever task he has instore for us, and the task will be a great joy to us.

It is here in the second part of verse 16 that John again makes a clear statement, that God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love then is the key to everything, love is the key to our faith, love is the key to us knowing God, love is the key to participating in God's work, and love is the key to our salvation to eternal life.

Verse 17 speaks of the day of judgement, and the day of judgement is a frightening prospect for many people. Jesus portrays that day in Matthew 25:31-46, where the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, and we are told that he sits on his throne and all the nations will be gathered before him, and then we have the story of the sheep and the goats.

In Matthew verse 33 he puts the sheep to his right hand and the goats to his left. Then the king will say to those on his right hand, come you are blessed by my Father come and inherit the kingdom prepared for you, while those to the left he will curse and tell them of their fate.

The difference between the blessed and the cursed will be determined by the way we have treated vulnerable people: how we treated the hungry, the thirsty, strangers, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner, in other words how we have loved our neighbours.

It is no wonder, then, that people worry about how Christ will judge them. Will he embrace them or reject them—bless them or curse them? Everything hangs in the balance because that moment will determine their eternal destiny as indeed it will determine ours.

But we who love God and who put our love to the service of other people through our faith and trust in Jesus Christ need not fear judgement day because in verse 18 John writes, “There is no fear in love, because perfect love casts out fear”.

But that doesn't mean that we want to die, St Paul writing to the Philippians wrote in verse 23, “I am torn between the two, ‘I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.’”

As loving Christians, we shouldn't be frightened of death, but that does not mean that we haven't got good reasons to live.

On judgement day Christ will make perfect those at his right hand, that's why he gave his life on the cross to make us perfect on judgement day, that's what Easter is all about, it reminds us that Jesus pledged himself to stand before God and to be our advocate, and anyone who is defended by Christ on judgement day will be saved to God through our Lord Jesus Christ and the key to that happening is love.

Verse 20 makes it plain that anyone can say that they love God, but that is not enough, we must put our love into action, and that can only be done by loving God's children which of course is all of us; God will measure our love for him by how much we love other people.

In the second half of verse 20 John writes that, “Those who say, ‘I love God’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.” And of course, our brothers and sisters are anyone and everyone in the world.

Revd. John White