

The Rock: 10-25-2020

Series: Abiding love

First reading: John 16:25-33

Title: Love each other

Scripture: 1 John 3:11-24

Theme:

They will know we are Christians by our love, and when that love is turned into action, the world sees Jesus. There is an assurance in our hearts that we are in Him if we abide and walk as He did

Introduction:

We are back once again this morning to the repetition of the Apostle John. Abide in Him, love one another. I'm captured by the image of my grandfather sitting in the corner of the living room of his home in Foxboro.

He had his corner table and his chair which sat right next to the fire place, and he would teach me and my sister and brother how to tie paper knots to start the fire with.

He'd tell us stories of his past, the war and all the things he experienced. Reflecting back, I am sure on a life

lived with all of its ups and downs, and twists and turns.

That's the picture I get over and over of John here in this letter. I can't help but have that vision in my mind's eye as I feel as though I am getting to know him more and more.

"How much time have I got left before I go to Jesus my lord? What do my children need to know more than anything else in this world? My time is short and this may be my last opportunity.

Love one another, abide in Him. Yes, those are the most important. Remind them too about how to live that out so the world sees it, not just hears it."

The Story:

The key verse to me in this section, and we will work our way to it, but I see it as verse 18:

"Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

-1 John 3:18 ESV

I must, we must lead in this world by example. In action, attitude and words. A growth piece for me as I am sure it is for others here this morning. What we

say, how we say it and then what we do is so important.

As it reflects a genuine heart attitude and frighteningly our inner struggles. John, here goes to the brotherly love piece right off as he brings his listeners and readers right back to the beginning of the Jewish story in the Scriptures: Cain and Abel:

"For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous."

-1 John 3:11-12 ESV

Cain here is not referenced by accident as though John was just searching for some filler story. No, he is the perfect example of a heart gone bad.

His heart was seen first in what he didn't do. He had brought a sloppy-second offering to the Lord, and then instead of hearing God's rebuke and correction, his actions toward his brother Abel showed his true heart.

He killed his brother -his deeds were evil, and Abel's were not.

"The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it." Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

-Genesis 4:6-9 ESV

Well, yes Cain, actually you are. In fact, we all are our brothers keeper. What is frightening about this story is that proximity to God and the truth is not what makes you right before Him.

That is no guarantee of rightness before God. Cain, you see, had every opportunity, just as Abel, to do right and to be right. He chose wrong.

In Jesus' day, when John was young and following him, the Pharisees as well had this same issue. They were the prodigal sons who never left the Father's side.

So close to Him that they never realized in their pride just how far from Him they actually were. Jesus calls them out -It's

not just about what you say! It is shown by what you do.

In challenging them with regard to their actions he says this in Matthew's telling of the Gospel:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!"

-Matthew 23:23-24 ESV

He condemns them for getting it wrong while they are getting it right. They were doing the easy stuff of simply giving things to the Temple. While not wrong they were missing the heart of the law.

Justice, mercy, faithfulness. All action seen in how we act and handle others in our world and sphere of influence.

I think we have to be careful, and thoughtful in our day to day dealings. Are we seeking God's heart and His desire when we are faced with what we would call today the "social justice" piece?

Do we sort that out from a political perspective as if to be for social justice means you are somehow a liberal and not Biblical? That somehow, we are violating the Scriptures by being "an enabler"?

Or do we try to see each instance in its own light, its own set of circumstances and set of needs as God reveals them to us.

You see, there are times when it is clear that people, and yes even brothers and sisters in Christ are just takers. There will always be takers and abusers of the systems and the good graces of the body of Christ.

But that doesn't mean we shut the system and ignore the Biblical commands we see John teaching here. Looking at verses 16-18 here in chapter 3:

"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

-1 John 3:16-18 ESV

We know love, because of the sacrifice of Jesus -The Cross, and as a result of that our way of living and serving must be transformed and look different than the world.

So, you see, understanding this "closing your heart" against them is important. It is clear that God's love abides in us and is then seen clearly in our actions. What we do.

Too often we think that God's love is seen in always giving everyone just what they want, always saying what we consider the "kind thing".

But what if the kind thing is the hard thing? What if the right thing is to say no, I won't simply give, but I will show, I will teach, I will walk with you into a healthier reality of life.

Harder perhaps for us, but better for them.

When Jesus rips the Pharisees in Matthew 23, He's not doing it so He can feel better by making them feel worse. NO!

His love for them led to a righteous anger at how they, who should have known better, didn't. They were just doing the easy stuff. Checking the box of minimum requirement, but forgetting the hard stuff:

Justice, mercy, the LOVE of God.
Faithfulness.

Cain, again is not referenced by accident. Be careful, is John's plea here in this section. I need to heed his warning. You need to heed it, and John's people needed to heed it.

Love one another-Abide in Him.

You see, loving one another, guarantees that you will abide in Him. Abiding in Him shows that you actually do love one another. All of this is a choice and an action on our parts.

How we meet the needs of our brothers and sisters shows God's love. That is the faith / works piece. Lip service does nothing. Actions speak volumes and shows a lot as well.

Every day you get up and your feet hit the floor you are given a day full of opportunities to shine. It's not just about being here on Sunday's. But the Church, out there, every day.

What do you do as a vocation? Do your absolute best at that as if you were serving God and not your boss, because you are.

There is so much John is unpacking for us here:

"By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him"

-1 John 3:19 ESV

Look at what you do, how you cat, how you treat others. These are all the outward proof of what God is doing inside of you.

I remember a story Ravi Zacharias once told from a book called: Of whom the world was not worthy, written by Marie Chapien:

"One day an evangelist by the name of Jakov arrived in a certain village. HE commiserated with an elderly man named Cimmerman on the tragedies he had experienced and talked to him of the love of Christ. Cimmermen abruptly interrupted Jakov and told him that he wished to have nothing to do with Christianity. HE reminded Jakov of the dreadful history of the church in his town, a history replete with plundering, exploiting, and indeed with killing of innocent people.

My own nephew was killed by them, he said and angrily rebuffed and effort on Jakov's part to talk about Christ. They wear those elaborate coats and crosses, he said, signifying a heavenly commission, but their evil designs and lives I cannot ignore.

Jakov, looking for an occasion to get Cimmerman to change his line of thinking, said, Cimmerman, Can I ask you a question? Suppose I were to steal your coat, put it on and break into a bank. Suppose further that the police sighted me running in the distance but could not catch up with me. One clue however put them onto your track: they recognized your coat. What would you say to them if they came to your house and accused you of breaking into the bank?

I would deny it... Ah, but we saw your coat, they would say. This analogy quite annoyed Cimmerman, who ordered Jakov to leave his home.

Jakov continued to return to the village periodically just to befriend Cimmerman, and encourage him, and share the love of Christ with him. Finally one day Cimmerman asked, How does one become a Christian? Jakov taught him the simple steps of repentance for sin and of trust in the work of Jesus Christ and gently pointed him to the Shepherd of his soul. Cimmerman bent his knee on the soil with his head bowed and surrendered his life to Christ.

As he rose to his feet, wiping his tears, he embraced Jakov and said, Thank you for being in my life, and then he pointed to

the heavens and whispered: You wear his coat very well."

-Of whom the world was not worthy: Marie Chapien

If you are in Christ this morning, you need to know that what you and I do, matters! How we do it matters, why we do it matters. Everything has Kingdom consequences -here on earth.

If you don't know this Jesus this morning, I don't want to move on without asking you: Would you consider Him today? He loves you, died for you and wants you to come to Him. You are not here today by accident.

Surrender to Him, and you will find a friend who will never leave you.

John says we can have confidence in all of this if our hearts do not condemn us:

"...for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him."

-1 John 3:20b-22 ESV

When we examine ourselves in light of Jesus and how he walked, and ask ourselves (examine): How am I doing by God's grace?

Then, in humility, ask God to fix us where we need fixing, because He will. And because He will, we can have confidence. Having that confidence of Jesus then, teaches us and reminds us to love one another, even in the hard times and through the hard stuff.

In our opening reading this morning from John's gospel, Jesus talks about overcoming. In many ways, it's a beautiful passage because it seems that the disciples are finally getting it.

"I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father." His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that

you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God."

-John 16:25-30 ESV

But then they are hit with a ton of bricks:

"Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe?"

-John 16:31 ESV

What comes next, is to me anyway, one of the clearest statements of trust in the Father, and because of that -LOVE for the brothers:

"Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

-John 16:32-33 ESV

You will all save yourselves, leaving me all alone. But I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I'm telling you this so that you will have peace. AMAZING. He's the one who is going to be

crucified, and his focus is where? On them!

Tough times are ahead for you. The world will be full of tribulations and trials. But don't worry, I have overcome.

Love as I have loved you -Abide in the Father as I have. These things will sustain you in trial, and will show the world that you belong to me.

This is what John is saying in these verses at the end of chapter three:

"And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us."

-1 John 3:23-24 ESV

So I end where I started. I just can't help reading this letter without seeing grampa in the corner, now late in life and in the shadow of a life well lived - Remembering all these things Jesus taught him, said to him, and lived out before his very eyes.

"I remember those nights, loved ones, my little children. I was there, much

younger, and a bit confused and scared really. We still didn't know how this was all going to turn out.

But He was right, when they came to take Him away that night, we all ran every which way, scattering into the night to save ourselves. But we remembered what He had said. We trusted in our hearts, even though we were struggling to make sense of it all.

We knew he forgave us, and that he would help us. We just needed to stay the course because he promised us His Spirit. Abide in Him, love one another.

What a story! In the blackness of my heart I am loved by God because of Jesus Christ His son. How can I not love? When I find it hard, and I often do, as I am sure you do too, how can we not allow Him to convict us and conform us so we can extend justice, mercy, faithfulness and the love of God.

Abide in Him -Love because He first loved us.