

“Those Who Love God Must Love Their Brothers and Sisters”

1 John 4: 7-21

When I began this sermon series on First John, I wondered how much more could we say about love after the first couple of weeks! I was worried that it would start to get repetitive. But as we have continued making our way through First John, I have come to the realization that not only is it not becoming repetitive, it is exactly the message that we as people of faith should be sharing over and over again every day, every hour, and every minute of our lives. And after listening to what is being said around our nation and in our community, this message of love and unity is exactly the message that we as people of God should be shouting out loud and clear until we are blue in the face and then at that point, we should take a deep breath and start all over again.

The message is simple: God is love. That's it. Three little words that have the power to transform the world if we would only allow them to do so. God is love. And everything, from the words that we say, to the way we interact with one another, to the way we live in community with our neighbors, should be based on and find their meaning and value in three words: God is love.

Now I know that I am preaching to the choir here. I'm not worried about this community of faith's understanding of the power of these three words. There have

been countless examples and stories of how this community of faith has been transformed by these three little words, and how this community of faith has lived them out, proclaiming once more that the Kingdom of God had come near.

But I will admit that while writing this sermon, I was in a very disgruntled place. As many of you know, I went home to North Carolina this past week for some rest and relaxation but as soon as I crossed the NC border, I was bombarded with negativity, radio ads, newspapers, billboards, all shouting at me and passersby, filling the serene landscape with negativity and fear. Now, I will say that I'm not bringing this up to let you know what side I would have chosen if I had voted this past Tuesday. I am bringing this up to say that the negativity and fear tactics were coming from both sides of the argument, both for and against the amendment. Each side was name-calling. Each side was making blanket statements. Each side was belittling the other's beliefs. And each side was not listening!

In the hopes of proving a point in the argument, what I noticed the most was that each side had forgotten three simple powerful words in all that they did. They had forgotten that God is love.

As I watched people I knew and people that I didn't know argue and fight, I couldn't help but feel like John, who, as he watched his very own community

being torn apart by fighting, just wanting to keep repeating over and over again, louder and louder: God is love! That's it. Why is this so hard?!

I couldn't help but feel like John who as he watched the divisions in the Body of Christ become deeper and as he watched the Body of Christ here on earth become more broken as the fighting continued, just wanting to say we are sacrificing love for the sake of what we think is truth without really knowing what is the Truth.

I couldn't help but feel like John who as he watched his very own community being torn apart, just wanting to say that we are called to make God's love visible in the world and we can't do that on our own. Love comes from God and from the very beginning, God has called people to be in community with one another, revealing God's love to the world, revealing God's face to the world, revealing that our God loved us so much that God sent God's only Son for us so that we might be transformed.

As the negativity and fear tactics continued from both sides of the debate while I was in North Carolina, I found myself, like John, just wanting to say, God is love and we can't truly love God who we have not seen if we don't love our brothers and sisters that we do see and interact with on a daily basis, regardless of whether we agree with them or not. God is love and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them. It is that simple. That's what it all boils down to:

God is love. No matter what truths we hold, it all comes back to one TRUTH and that truth is God's love for us. It all comes down to the fact that all are claimed and named as God's own, that all of God's people are made in the image of God, and that all of God's children are called to live in community with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. That's the TRUTH that is the basis of our faith and our calling as disciples of Christ. That is the Truth that God tells us from the beginning. That is the Truth that binds us together in Christian love. that is TRUTH that we have forgotten as we have allowed the divisions in the Body of Christ to become deeper as we as people of faith have continued to fight and argue with one another, regardless of the issue at hand. And that is the Truth that I was reminded of this week as once again, like John, I experienced three powerful words.

as the sermon writing continued this week, I seemed to remain in this disgruntled place until the Kingdom of God broke through and I was once again reminded of God's simple message of love and unity. I will tell you that I stayed in this disgruntled place most of this week because even though I left North Carolina, the negativity and the fear tactics seemed to follow me home through outlets such as social media, news, blogs, and other forms of communication so prevalent nowadays.

And as I tried to process my mood and God's word this week, I found comfort and hope once more in the strangest of places. It was in a blog's comment section. And after scrolling through and reading more arguments for and against the amendment, I stumbled across a modern day first John who finally was able to capture the Kingdom of God for me in words, pull me out of my disgruntled mood and remind me once more of the good news that we as people of faith are called to share with all of God's children.

The person simply said, "I'm tired of the fighting. I want my faith to be known for so much more. I wish people would say, "Oh yeah, she's one of those Christians who wants everyone to have clean water, who wants everyone to have access to food, who wants abuse of children to stop, who wants trafficking to stop, who thinks no one should be afraid of who they live with, who wants everyone to be embraced and loved as a child of God, who reminds herself each day that they will know we are Christians by our love."

In that moment, the Kingdom of God became real for me and I felt God's Spirit renewing God's creation once more. In that moment, I was reminded once again of three simple powerful words: God is love! In that moment, I found healing and reconciliation for the Body of Christ here on earth.

In that moment, I felt like John, who knew that regardless of the fighting and the arguing, God would have the last word, that love would have the last word and

that word of love would become even more visible and even more tangible when together we are the church, loving one another and offering our lives for the sake of this world.

The good news that I came to realize, the good news that we are called to share, the good news that we know deep down will never get old or repetitive or that we never get tired of hearing is that when we come together as the living, breathing, loving Body of Christ and live out this gift at the local church level, we reveal the face of God to the world. We reveal the love of God through service, worship, fellowship, breaking bread with one another, and most importantly, by embracing the knowledge that as ones who love God, we must love our brothers and sisters, all our brothers and sisters, not just the ones that think like us or act like us. If we love God, we must love our brothers and sisters.

That's the good news that John has been sharing with us all along. That's the good news that John tells us that we should never be ashamed to share. That's the good news that never gets old or repetitive. If we love God, we must love our brothers and sisters.

As I read this woman's comments to the blog, it was in that moment that I became aware of the Kingdom of God in my midst, and once again, I had hope. I had hope because I had come to realization that although what was being argued about had changed over the years, the fighting and the arguing had been going on

since the beginning of time and through it all, God has been there reminding us that God is love and we as people of faith, as disciples of Christ, as ones who love God must love our brothers and sisters in all things, through all things, as claimed and named as God's own. God has been there reminding us for three powerful life transforming words: God is love.

And that will always be the last word.

May we always share these three powerful simple words with all of God's children in all things and through all things. Amen.