

## Love is Divine Power

### 1 John 4: 7-21

As I sat down to write this particular sermon, my initial thought was “What more can I say?” What more can I add to John’s eloquent and transforming words with a sermon?” To be honest, I almost thought about reading John’s words and simply saying, “Go and do likewise.”

John’s words are beautiful, simple and to the point....God is love. No one has ever seen God yet if we love one another, God lives in us and God’s love is made whole through us.” See what I mean. Beautiful, simple and to the point. And yet...And yet, after some 2000 years, we as people of faith, still can’t get it right. Each and every day, we experience harsh words filling up our social media avenues. Each and every day, we hear about hate and hurt coming to life within our own communities. Each and every day, we know that fear is taking root more and more within our wider culture. Fear is becoming the lens through which we view one another as human beings. How did we even move from love to fear? And the bigger question, how do we move back to love?

Please hear me say, I know that I am not the first who has asked these particular questions. They are the questions every generation strives to answer just to prove that they unlike all the others have got it all figured out. Each generation

assumes that if we can tackle and answer these questions, the question of changing how often fear overwhelms us, the question of how we move beyond fear back to love as humankind, each generation assumes that if they can tackle and answer these questions, then of course, we will be able to solve every issue and concern. Because after all, all we need is love, right?

Well yes and no. What I mean by this is too often as humans, when we talk about love, we tend to think of the mushy, gushy, Hallmark love, you know the love where we assume it will always be sunshine and rainbows, you know the type of love where everyone is happy and everything is perfect, you know the love where they all live happily ever after.

That's not the type of love John is referring to in this text. The type of love which John is referring to in this text is Agape love. It is an all encompassing, welcoming, down and dirty type of love. It is a love which challenges us to become the people God created and calls us to be. It is a love that will not let us go. It is a love which is grounded in the very character of God: generous, compassionate, and merciful. It is a love which transcends and persists regardless of the circumstances.

John knows that this agape love is not what we feel but rather what we do. It is not an abstract principle we experience only in theory. It is a force, the most powerful force in our world. It is force which brings about healing and wholeness

for all of God's people. It is a force which overcomes hate and hurt, uniting us one. It is the love which we all know and have experienced in our own lives because God first loved us.

In our text today, John reminds his community and in doing so, reminds us as well that we are not born knowing how to love. As children, as teenagers, and yes even as adults, we must be taught how to love. We must experience it in our own lives to know it is real. We do this by engaging the presence of God in our midst each and every day. We do this by encountering the ordinary miracles which fill our lives. We do this by realizing that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. Because we know agape love cannot and does not gain strength simply from our own limited human capacities. We know agape love because God first loved us. We can share this type of love with others because God first loved us. Notice that John never says we ought to love one another. He simply reminds us that we can love one another...all because God first loved us.

I'm not saying anything new here. This is what Jesus talked about when he calls us to love one another. This is what the prophets talked about when they challenged us to care for the least of these. This Agape love is what all the writers of our sacred text refer to when they call us to show the world that there is another way. As people of faith, this is what we believe. This is what we do when we try to practice what we preach. This is what makes us who we are as the Body of

Christ here on Earth...the knowledge that love is Divine Power. The wisdom to know that love will always overcome. The belief that Love will always have the last word.

This is not new information I am sharing with today. But it is a radical and controversial Truth. Many in our world believe that power and might are the only ways to solve problems. Many in our world tell us that we are naïve and ask what does love have to do with it? And many in our communities call us heretics because we dare to speak out for those who are often ignored or forgotten by others all because we have experience God's love in our lives.

I have to tell you a few years ago when I preached from this particular text, I had a gentlemen get up, and walk out of church while I was preaching. Maybe not my finest hour but surely it wasn't that bad of a sermon. So I checked in with him later that day and he was so angry. He was angry at the fact that I had preached about LOVE, that I had said all that stuff about how love will break down barriers, all that stuff about how love will united us , all that stuff about how love would overcome any division.

This gentlemen was so angry that I had dared to preach that we cannot love God who we haven't seen if we do not love our brothers and sisters, if we do not love the very people we encounter each day, people who may look differently from

us, people who may think differently from us, people who may act differently from us, this gentleman was so angry that I had dare to preach from this very pulpit that we cannot love God who we haven't seen if we do not love our brothers and sisters, the very ones we encounter every single day.

Needless to say, this gentleman has never come back. I share this with you not because I celebrate this fact. I share this with you because I often wonder if I did the right thing, if I would take back what I had said that day. And my answer is always no. LOVE as the Divine Power is what I claim, Love as the Divine Power is what we claim as people of faith. It is the Truth which shapes us. It is the Truth which transforms us. It is the Truth which invites forgiveness and compassion. LOVE as the Divine Power is the sacred Truth from the Tree of Life that releases us from the things which prevent us from becoming the people of hope, the people of grace, the people of reconciliation that God created and calls us to be.

You see, as people of faith, we tend to forget we were never promised that the living out of this love, the speaking out about this love, the sharing of this love with others would be easy. Rather the opposite is true. Time and time again, as disciples of Christ, we are told that when we live out Love as the Divine Power, the world will despise us, people will hate us, and others will try to silence us.

Yet, we know something this world does not know. We know that even if we were quiet about this all-encompassing life changing love which God first showed us, love and hoarded it all to ourselves, even if we were silent, the very stones of God's creation would cry out to tell how much God loved this world that God gave God's only Son so that we might live.

Or as someone who is way smarter than me put it... Too often as humans we fail to see the impressive power of love in our world. We fail to see the life changing effects love has upon us as humankind. Rather instead, we moan and complain about what's wrong with our world. When it comes to our faith, we wish that the crowd would have made Jesus King that day, using force if they had to. As disciples of Christ, too often we wish that the powers that be would have allowed Jesus to be King that day because then Rome would have been defeated and in doing so, we would have been able to assume that all our problems would just disappear. Everything would have been fine. Everything would have been black and white and we would have none of this messy, frustrating in between stuff we call life.

Except Jesus knew us better than we knew ourselves and he refused. Instead, Jesus went to the cross to show us that our ways are not God's ways. He came so that we might live. And through his resurrection, he opened the door to a new Kingdom...and then, then he did something amazing. He left. And as he was

leaving, he turned to his disciples and simply said, "Now it's your turn. I'll help through the power of the Spirit, but for now, you're called to do it." Make this kingdom of radical love grow so that all will know healing and wholeness. Make this Kingdom of radical love become the Truth, the Way and the Life. Make this Kingdom of radical love grow. As children of God, you have experienced this love because God first loved you. So now and always go and do likewise." Amen.