

Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 2, 2021  
“All You Need Is Love” (1 John 4:7-21)

A teenage boy had pleaded with his father for several weeks to be able to drive the dad’s BMW for a really big date. The boy was relentless in his begging, and Dad was equally relentless in his stubbornness. But finally the teenager was able to wear him down. Dad agreed, but he had some stipulations. Both the boy and the car had to be home by midnight. And the teenager had to promise to call if anything – anything at all out of the ordinary – happened. Well, about 10:00 the boy called home and said, *Dad, remember you told me to call if anything happened?* Dad said, *Sure I remember, what’s the problem?* The boy continued, *Well, the car sort of sounds funny. It sounds like there’s water in the engine.* Dad was a little confused and asked, *What makes you think there’s water in the engine?* *Because I kind of drove the car into the lake,* came the reply.

This story is amusing, but what if that had been you child and your BMW? What would your reaction have been? I don’t know how the father in the story reacted, and I’m not sure how I would react. But the best response would be: *Are you alright?* That’s love. That’s how love responds: being genuinely concerned with the other’s welfare. And love is what I want to talk about this morning.

Our second lesson again this week comes from 1 John. This book – this letter – is called the “love letter” of the Bible. Just as 1 Corinthians 13 is called the “love chapter,” 1 John is often referred to as the “love letter” because love is its predominant theme. That old song by the Beatles, *All You Need Is Love*, pretty much sums up the content of this epistle. It calls us to be followers of Christ and people of love. It reminds us that the love of Christ in our lives is the one thing that sets us apart from the rest of the world and reminds us that love really is all we need.

The first thing our passage for today teaches us is that love is from God. Love always has its origin in God. It was out of God’s love that we were created in God’s image. Without God, we wouldn’t be. Without God we couldn’t begin to know what love is or what love is all about.

But how do we know that love is real? Well, the same way we know that electricity is real: by its effect. Like love, electricity is invisible. We can’t see it, but we can see its effects every time we turn on a light, the TV or a stovetop. We don’t even have to have anything electric to see its effect. We can simply watch a lightning storm, and through our senses, feel the effect of electricity and know it is real.

Love is revealed in much the same way. Generally speaking, we can’t see love. It doesn’t take a shape or form that we can readily identify. We can’t go into a store and order 5 pounds or a gallon of love, just like we can’t go in and order a gallon of electricity, but we know love when we see it. We know love by its effect on our lives and the lives of those around us. That’s when love becomes tangible.

John tells us this morning of a time in history when love became tangible. In fact, it became more than just tangible. God’s love became flesh and blood and walked among us. Our immortal and eternal God wrapped himself in flesh and bone and became one of us. God’s love is revealed to us in Jesus, but it is most fully revealed in his death on the cross for our sake.

The king of Armenia stood before the conquering Roman general who had just subdued his kingdom. The king fell to his knees and pled with the general: *Do whatever you wish with me, but I beg you to spare the lives of my family.* The general spared the life of both the king and his family. Later, the king asked his wife what had been her impression of the Roman conqueror. *I never saw him,* she responded. The king couldn't believe it and asked, *How could you not have seen him? He was only a few feet away. What were you looking at?* With tears welling up in her eyes, the queen replied, *I only saw you, the one who was willing to die so that I might live.*

That is love. It is the same kind of remarkable love which is revealed in Christ and is at the very center of the heart of God. And it is the kind of love which should be at the center of our walk with Christ; the kind of love that should govern the things we do.

That's the second thing this passage tells us: that *since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.* The formula, you see, is pretty simple: God loves us. God loves us enough to send Jesus. Because of Jesus, we should love one another.

Eugene Peterson once wrote: *No life of faith can be lived privately. There must be overflow into the lives of others.* In other words, where there is faith, there is love; and love can't just sit there doing nothing. It never sits and idles. Love is always active.

In the *Peanuts* comic strip, Linus and Charlie Brown are all bundled up with coats and caps on a snowy, wintry day. They spot Snoopy shivering in the cold. Desiring to comfort him, they walk over to him. Linus speaks first: *Be of good cheer, Snoopy.* Charlie Brown adds: *Yes, be of good cheer.* Then they turn and walk away. Snoopy is left still shivering. A big question mark appears over his puzzled expression as he watches Linus and Charlie Brown walk away.

Christian love, you see, is to carry us beyond words. It is to move us to action. God has blessed us abundantly so that we might share abundantly with those in need. John's love letter says that we are to love one another just as God has first loved us. Therefore, our love is to be offered in deeds, not just through words and speech. God didn't just tell us he loved us; he put his words into action. And he calls us to do the same. Hopefully, we can do a better job of showing love than Linus and Charlie Brown did.

Perhaps a look at our first lesson for today will help us see what God desires for us. In this text, we see how faith and love are shared between Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch. For many of us, it is easier to love from a distance, rather than up close and personally. It's less complicated and less involved. For example, it is much easier to write a check to a relief agency or charity than to love or take care of our neighbor next door. Sometimes it is easier to say a prayer for the person far away than to reach out physically to someone one in need within our own community. Yet, the commandment is to love one another, regardless of how near or far.

That's what God calls us to do; but we don't have to do it alone. The Holy Spirit is there to assist us. In this story, Phillip provides us a model as to how it can be done – one person, one event, or one situation at a time. Phillip listens for direction from the Holy Spirit. Phillip then acts by going to the Ethiopian eunuch, meeting him on the eunuch's turf. He assesses where the Gentile is spiritually, and then discerns what the Spirit would have him do. Phillip encounters the man,

but waits for the man's invitation to join him. Phillip is not pushy. He waits until he is invited before getting into the chariot. Once the invitation is given, Phillip shares his faith story and how he has been changed by God's love through Christ. His focus is on the individual – an up-close, personal, one-on-one encounter.

The commandment is to love one another; to be there for one another. This certainly happens corporately, like when we and thousands of others assist flood or hurricane victims or send shoe boxes to Samaritan's Purse. But it is most effective when it is one-on-one; when we tend to each tree instead of the forest. It might be as simple as making a phone call to an estranged acquaintance, delivering cookies to a homebound person, spending time with someone who is lonely, helping an elderly neighbor with shopping or yard work, taking 15 minutes in an aisle of the grocery store listening to someone who needs to talk, offering a smile to someone we don't know, helping build a habitat house for a struggling family, or handing someone a Mobile Café meal.

If each of us will be intentional about sharing our faith and loving our neighbor, there could be innumerable people in this – and every community – who will receive an invaluable gift from us: the gift of God's love in action.

John's love letter teaches us first that love is from God. *We love because God first loved us.* Then it reminds us and challenges us by saying, *since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.* And finally, it tells us that *if we love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us.*

What this means is that even though no one can see God, they do see us. As believers – as branches connected to the Vine – we are called to bear good fruit. God created us for this purpose. And when we show God's love to the world his love is completed – or perfected in us. Through our actions, the world sees what God is like. And when we display to the world what God is like, we are glorifying God. Our love for one another, then, fulfills God's purpose in creating us in God's image: that we might glorify God.

Our challenge is to avoid becoming complacent. It is to continue listening to the needs of our community and responding in love. When we accept God's gift and share it with others, people will know we are Christians by our love. And we will discover that God's love really is all we need!