

WELCOME 6 May 2018 – 6 Easter '18 B

1 John 4:1-21

Good morning! and welcome to our on-going Easter celebrations! Never forget...Easter is not just a day...not only a season...Easter is a way of life! We as a church make that life visible as the church...And it is great to have you all here this morning. Please stay with us for morning tea so we can all get a chance to know one another better.

On June 25, 1967 the BBC commissioned the Beatles to write a song for the UK's contribution to the TV show Our World, which was the 1st live global television link-up. The Beatles were asked to write/perform a song that would contain a simple message that could be understood around the world.

What song did they write? "Love is all you need." And with that song the Beatles struck a nerve across the globe. That song hit home in the heart of over 400 million television viewers & was quickly #1 on European & US pop charts. Why such immediate success?

Not lyrics or music...that's for sure. Humans are born longing for & in need of love. Amazon lists about 300K books with love in the title. Google counts 8.5 billion hits for the word on the web, & you can't get an accurate count for the number of "love songs" - just too many. Without question love is an essential element of human existence. But what is it...really?

According to grandpa John real love is something completely beyond our natural capability. Real love takes broken sinful people & makes them heirs of eternity & ambassadors of the only power that destroys death/evil & grants peace/joy beyond human comprehension. *This is real love — not that we loved God, but that he loved us & sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. 1 Jn 4:10-11*

Real love is doing whatever possible to ensure that what God desires for another person comes to pass. It always reflects God's love for us. It transforms everything it touches. It reproduces & bears fruit always seeking to touch & bless & draw close from the heart of the Father to every heart on earth. Love is always about carrying out God's desires in the life of someone else

And we'll explore & experience that together today... LWKids is on holidays but it will be back soon...slightly new format...should be exciting!

Let's pray...

Lord, we come as we are, to become what you meant us to be. We come as we are, broken, afraid, and full of disappointment at times. And we ask you to make us whole and set us free. We come as we are, with all our plans and our dreams, our joy and our sorrows, to be touched by your grace and held in your love. We come as we are, God, and we trust you to make us what you desire for us to be. We thank you for mercy that reaches out, for patience that waits our return, for love that is always ready to welcome us and bring us home...In Jesus' name...Amen

6 EASTER '18 B A – VISIBLE CHURCH: VISIBLE LOVE – 1 JOHN 4:1-21

- FAITH CHAT:** 1. Share a time when you felt God's love most strongly.
2. In what ways do you express God's love to others?
3. How do you express your love to God?

When we moved from NTx to Wagga 13 & some years ago, the church we served threw a "going-away" party. Bob XXXX, a really good guy in the congregation served as MC & he did a really funny take off on my preaching...he's from Chicago so his accent was odd, but other than that...he had me down.

At one point he said you could fall asleep during any of my sermons & as long as you heard part of it you'd get my point because I repeat myself 3X. Some of y'all are laughing 'cos you know...I tell you what I'm going to tell you. Then I tell you. Then I tell you what I told you. 3X...simple. My kids are relieved it's not just how I talk to them...it's just what I do...But I'm in great company. **BIBLES**

Were you just listening to my namesake...John the Apostle/Evangelist? He used 1 word, love, more times in this one chapter than any other book in the NT...in fact 2X more in this chapter than in any other chapter in the 66 books of the Bible. Even I don't repeat myself that much! (4:7-21 – 29X 4:7-5:3 - 32X 43X in the entire letter) So like any good parent who expects that their kids will actually take on board something they've said repeatedly...John expects we will understand that the defining characteristic of our life in Christ will be ____? Perfect morality? Religious scrupulousness? Philosophical astuteness? Embrace joyously Wagga's new 3-bin system of rubbish & recycling collection? Of course not...It's that word "love." But w/ 8 ½ billion options on Google & 300K Amazon titles to choose from not to mention half-a-dozen matchmaking/love-finding variations on TV at any given moment...I'm thinking "Love" might just be the most misused & misapplied word in the English language. In fact, James Ellis III (Chaplain of Discipleship @ Hope College in Holland MI) writes...*Increasingly these days, I see Christians embracing a paper-thin form of love. This love promotes comfort, and warm, fuzzy feelings of peace on earth, but has little-to-no understanding that God BOTH loves us AND has otherworldly expectations for how we conduct ourselves. (emphasis mine)*

Hang on now...Who did he say has embraced a "paper-thin form of love?" That shallow gaggle of bachelor/ette contestants? The high school heartthrobs trying to do what high school heartthrobs are infamous for? The authors/songwriters/Hwood folks who clutter the culture with all sorts of half-baked efforts at love? No...he says it's us/Christians/disciples...Jesus followers who get it wrong...And I think John saw it too which is why he is so dogged in planting in the heart of the church/disciples the real/true/authentic/genuine love that is beyond our natural capacity/capability... but **to which** God calls us & **for which** God empowers us...

Real love takes broken sinful people & makes them heirs of eternity & ambassadors of the only power that destroys death/evil & grants peace/joy beyond human comprehension. How do I know?

This is real love — not that we loved God, but that he loved us & sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. 1 Jn 4:10-11 Which means...? Real love is always reflective of God's love for us

God's love is not some abstract concept/theory/philosophical construct. God's love is passion expressed in action. God made love real/powerful/present by sending Jesus to live among us & die for us all the while saying "this is what God's love for you looks like." God continues to manifest love through Jesus' life-giving presence w/in/among us. If you question whether God truly does love you, the gift & witness of the Holy Spirit confirm it once more: We are God's beloved. God's love is more fundamental & more reliable than the ground beneath us & the air we breathe.

God's love does not depend on our initiative or our worthiness. We don't have to reach out to God or even believe in God in order to be loved. We don't have to clean up our act before God can love us. We don't have to measure up to be lovable. God loves us undeserving as we are. God loves us whether we love Him back or not. God can't "not love" you. God is love. God's very being is love that seeks to draw us in...if God were any other way God would not be God. That is who he is. Full stop. No other love comes close. And no other god is described that way...intimate – personal – love...seeking you.

The full benefits of that love are ours when the Spirit draws our heart to trust that God is love & God is love for me: that's faith. And my love for another has its origins right there...in the reality that God loves me from forever to forever & will never quit. My love for another does not originate in me...this is not its starting point. My love for someone else does not begin in them...their loveliness/lovability or even their need for love. Anytime I look for a starting point for love outside of God's love that pours out on/in me...I'm sure to find something other than love.

God's love for each one of us comes to us so that our lives might reflect that love toward others in real tangible ways. Real love is always about carrying out God's desires in the life of someone else...not my desires...not even those of the one I claim I love...If I say I love you then I am to be pouring all I have into seeing God's desires made real in you. So how does love become paper thin/unreal/something other than real love? Love becomes "paper-thin" when I think my highest

goal is your happiness. Love becomes “*paper-thin*” when I think my highest love for you is to tolerate embrace never challenge or never hold you accountable never point you toward a more Godly path. Love becomes “*paper-thin*” when I think I have to “feel” love before I act in love.

Old but true: God is not invested in my happiness but in my holiness...making me like him. God’s love for me does not negate His holiness...and His holiness & my sinfulness cannot co-exist at all together...Sin is rebellion against God...defiance in the face of his commands. Sin is the ultimate in selfishness, doing what I want to do regardless of what God says or how it affects anyone else. And as miserable as all of the effects of sin are: pain, strife, sadness, guilt, shame...none of it compares to the real result of sin: eternal death separated from God forever. But God’s love conquers my sin by the death/rez of Jesus Christ...Sin’s power is broken by that manifest love...And by that same power & that same love my love for you or for my wife or my kids is going to invest in your holiness...often at the expense of your happiness...I hope I never let you get away with stuff that is harmful hurtful destructive or ungodly...I hope you never wait on your feelings before you act in love for someone else...feelings are fleeting & untrustworthy & are never a good basis for any action...Real love is always reflective of God’s love for us...w/o restraint w/o regard to cost & w/o seeking return...but in that...

Real Love possesses the power of transformation; not the goal but often as a result. vs 16-19 *“We know how much God loves us, & we have put our trust in his love. God is love, & all who live in love live in God, & God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, & this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. We love each other because he loved us first.”*

We are born longing for & in need of love...but we are not born perfectly capable of doing so...our inborn sin mucks that up & even our best efforts are doomed to failure without the transforming power of God’s love. God’s love is always transforming...it takes me out of darkness into light, out of death into life... out of selfishness into servanthood...but my/your love for someone else may never see that sort of change...because that’s not the goal...the goal of my loving someone else is simply to love them as God loves me & pray that my interaction with them achieves God’s purposes...not mine. The NT says we love someone else because God loves them & we love them because we want to be like Jesus. Whether they change or not. Whether they join us in worship, or not. Whether they become the kind of person we want them to be, or not - really doesn’t have anything to do with us. Real Love possesses the power of transformation; not as its goal but often as its result. *So let’s not get tired (grow weary) of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up. – Gal 6:9* You see...it may be the transformation God seeks is in here...in you or in me...the more we live love the less fear & more boldness emerges

Here’s the other cool thing...In his gospel, John remembers Jesus said: *I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, & I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch & withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned.*

Real love reproduces & bears fruit always seeking to touch & bless & draw close from the heart of the Father to every heart on earth. Real love always reaches to touch another life...reaches for more...not to possess but to bless...to engage in the name of Jesus for the love of the Father that never rests until every heart is changed eternally.

Such love can never originate with us. It is not our own, weak, limited love that we share with God’s world. No, we are called to open ourselves to God’s love so that God can love others through us. When we love one another, we represent God to the world. By allowing the love that God has showered on us to overflow onto our sisters/brothers, we make divine love real & visible in the ordinary lives of ordinary people. God invites us to let Jesus live in us, so that through us Jesus can continue to welcome outcasts & touch untouchables & heal the broken. When God’s unimaginable, limitless love comes alive in us; we become the real presence of God in the world. All we can possibly say to such love is thank you, & may it indeed be so.

Let’s pray for that work to continue in each of us...Lord Jesus we love you because you first loved us. Let your love transform our hearts so that we love like you and live like you. Let your love reach its fullness in our lives in this world so that everyone we meet will meet you, the One who is Love and be eternally made new. We pray trusting in your Name...Amen