

WELCOME 17th September 2023 – 16th Sunday after Pentecost '23 A

1 John 4:7-21

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have in your hands **Growing Praise inserts & Bible Study Qs** that are able to lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life, & help you share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.** Link will be on website...Tuesday...Wednesday...

As we move into this week... "You'd think that people would've had enough of silly love songs" - Yet in 1976 Paul McCartney & his wife Linda added to the 1000s already written & wrote another. Along w/ the 100s "love story" movies, the countless books/articles on love...the latest "fake-reality" TV experience. Clearly our world is starved for some new expression of whatever passes for love in the current moment. As the song says, "but I look around me & I see it isn't so."

Obviously not...There is something in human nature that knows we were made to love & be loved. It drives us to connect w/ & seek meaningful relationships w/ others. But at the same time, **we** prove incapable of finding it within ourselves or genuinely extending it to others unconditionally.

That's because nearly none of those songs, books, movies, fake-reality TV, or most people begin where real love originates: **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.

And as a result of that reality...that real love...that move of God the Father toward us in love by the sacrifice of Jesus the Son...we then as recipient of real love are called to make that kind of love real in the lives of those around us...**Dear** friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.

It really is that simple...Love is only love with Christ at its **heart**...Disconnected from Jesus we can do many things...many good things...but real love always finds its origin, strength & destiny in the love we know in Christ crucified/risen/ruling over all.

Today we'll share together that simple reality...the love of Christ transforms us & all things by the power of God through the work of the Holy Spirit **AND** creates among us lives devoted to living that love in every circumstance of our daily lives & into the lives of those we encounter. Functional relationships are those that grow in & are guided by real love revealed in Jesus Christ.

Let's pray...and then explore that together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father you call us to a life of love & to a holiness that speaks of your life within us. Free us from our worst & release us into your best & most glorious. Pour out again your Spirit among us so that in this hour your word may penetrate deeply into our hearts & be lived every day...especially in those relationships within the walls of our own homes...through Jesus Christ...Amen.

Let's sing & then hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. Where (or in whom) have you seen self-sacrificing love this past week?
2. Where (or for whom) is it hardest for you to "love one another"? Why is that?

16 PENTECOST '23 A – **DysFUNCTIONAL: DysFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

In his delightful book, **Practicing** *the Way of Jesus: Life together in the Kingdom of Love*, author Mark Scandrette shares an experience he had speaking at a conference of church leaders. He had been introduced but not yet spoken & during a break b/t sessions a man approached & asked, “What do you **do?**” Scandrette replied, “I help people live out the teachings of Jesus.” The other man looked puzzled, then asked, “**Does** your work have anything to do with Christianity?”

We can laugh @ that...but his question is real... In the eyes of many, even many *inside* the church, **the** life of the church is somehow seen as separate & distinctly different from the life of Jesus. I know I've mentioned Dan Kimball's old book, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*...in which he interviews non-Xns who say simply that the little they know of Jesus looks nothing like what they know of their Xn friends, family, acquaintances, **AND** the caricature of the church/Xns/Xnty presented by 21st cent Western culture...TV, movies, books, blogs...has its roots in that separation. But it seems to me; the struggle to understand that **the** life & work of the church is **solely & only** to live the life of Jesus everywhere we are every day we live is as old as the apostles. Remember what the 12 were pretty good at doing...

They argued about who was greatest, jockeyed for positions of prominence in the kingdom, chased away children, blamed one another for not having brought enough bread on a journey, never quite understood what Jesus was doing, ran away when he was arrested & once thought calling down fire from heaven was a good idea. The struggle to understand that **the** life & work of the church is **solely & only** to live the life of Jesus everywhere we are every day we live is as old as the apostles.

But Jesus assured those same slow-to-understand followers: **Jn 15:9 & 17** - “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love...This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.” It's simple really but more difficult than anything I can imagine. According to Jesus I have one job...we have one responsibility ...**Love** like Jesus loved as opportunity presents :||...& immediately following those verses we get the rationale...the power for that kind of living out of his love: **Jn 15:13-14** - There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. World sees me & my friendship in you when you live my love into the world

Jesus names us “*friends*.” That is HUGE! That's what we were intended to be from the moment humans drew the breath of life from God's lungs. Friends...companions ...image-bearers & purpose-sharers...But those early ancestors declared their **autonomy** from God. They staked their claim on their ability to stand alone apart

from God (in the place of God) & we became God's enemies. Now Jesus says God's grace & immense love for us has brought him from glory to the dirt/death of this earth to reconcile us to God – to make us friends w/ God again. He will die so we can be friends w/ God...so our graves will be emptied...so death can't hold us forever...so sin's grip on our hearts will be broken. He will die/rise to restore that relationship w/ God we were supposed to enjoy all along...to make us friends w/ God THAT LOVE, Jesus says, is now in us & is intended to move through us to other people...at every level in every interaction...everywhere we are every day we live **God** showed how much he loved us by sending his one & only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. 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. Blaise Pascal - mathematician, scientist – said, “Make people wish the gospel were true...then **show them** that it **is.**” Jesus-style love...love we know that originates in the Father's grace toward us in Jesus... is not how I **feel** about you on any given day. Some days I may feel pretty unkindly disposed toward you...but love that flows from our friendship w/ the Father as restored by Jesus' death/rez leads me to choose concrete action on behalf of the beloved...someone outside of me...to do everything God allows for them so that their deepest needs are served...irrespective of my momentary feelings...

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 unreal/something other than real love? When I think my highest goal is your happiness. 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. When I think I have to “feel” love before I act in love. Real love is always about carrying out God's desires in the life of someone else...everywhere we are every day we live

Acc to John/Jesus real love is completely beyond our natural capability. 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 w/o 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 or 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 w/ 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 w/ 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. 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.

Jesus is clear; He will re-create us through his dying & rising into what we were supposed to be all along – God's friends/beloved children...& by his Spirit he will create in us hearts that love & lives that live that love...at all times in all places among all people...everywhere we are every day we live. Love at times calls for great sacrifice, but we are never disgraced or devalued by living sacrificially for others but actually live more fully into who we are called to be. Self-giving sacrificial love (generosity, hospitality, compassion, kindness, forgiveness, encouragement) always makes us more like Christ & always reveals to the other person more of what Christ has for them & can create in them. Read this somewhere, 'People may not trust Christ until they trust a Christian.' *some time back I stumbled on this...*

James Ellis III (Chaplain of Discipleship @ Hope College in Holland MI) wrote...Increasingly these days, *I see Christians embracing a paper-thin form of love. This love promotes comfort, & 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* We are chosen, named "friends," died for risen for, filled w/ the Spirit for...purpose... not privilege but purpose. To make Christ's cross visible everywhere we are every day we live so that the cross touches lives all around us. Jesus called us his friends & modeled a lifestyle of drawing close to those who needed him most AND lives & this world were transformed in joy for eternity. I love the conversation Jesus has w/ his enemies when they try to hammer him for hanging out w/ the sinful disreputable folks in town: Mk 2:17 – *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."* Jesus came to us not because we were worthy but because we are wounded...& he came not to finish us off but to make us new. 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... the life & work of the church is solely & only to live the life of Jesus everywhere we are every day we live. *I noted earlier –*

Love is only love with Christ at its heart...Disconnected from Jesus we can do many things...many good things...but real love always finds its origin, strength & destiny in the love we know in Christ crucified/risen/ruling over all. 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.

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Functional relationships are those that grow in & are guided by real love revealed in Jesus Christ.

TAKE IT HOME – *As you leave today...be specific & share with your neighbour...*

Who are 3 people, at the edges of your normal circle of relationships, to whom you can show Christ's love this week?

What's your plan?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Gracious Father, we praise you for your love and faithfulness. Thank you for your grace which repairs every flaw and heals every brokenness in our lives. By your Spirit help us to live in your love and share it freely through words that are encouraging, thoughts that are gracious and actions that are loving. Make all our relationships reflections of your grace at work in our lives. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.