

## The Sermon: The Remedy for the Division

We have been living in fear of the Covid-19 pandemic for a year. We are also experiencing political, economic, social, and racial division in our society. How did we become such a divided nation? It seems our culture, our nation, our world, our people have multiplied the ways to divide us. It seems the *us* and *thems* have been running very high lately. It's by no means an excuse, but throughout history, our world has been filled with wars and plunder, and oppression. There have always been the weak and the powerful, the haves and the have-nots. There has been too much us versus them since Jesus's day and even farther back in history. Sadly, there still is.

Our scripture reading teaches us what the remedy for this division is. 1 John 4:7 says, "Beloved, let us love one another because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." Love is the remedy for the division. John continued to say in verse 10, "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." It is why God's love is so radical. We have to know that God loved us first. It is why Jesus' teaching was so radical. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:43-44

Jesus didn't only tear down the walls of division at His birth, He continuously reached across the chasm of separation and exclusion. He befriended hated tax collectors, and even invited one, Matthew, to follow as one of His twelve disciples. He spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well, which broke a couple of societal taboos at once. Jews did not associate with Samaritans, and Jewish men especially did not talk with women like this in public. He told His listeners that if a dreaded Roman soldier forced them to carry his pack for a mile, which the soldiers could and did do, to carry it two miles instead.

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One of Jesus's most powerful stories about this kind of unexpected love in action is the story of the Good Samaritan. You know how it goes. A traveler was robbed and beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. A priest came along and crossed the road to avoid the bloody scene. An assistant priest did the same. But finally, a Samaritan came along and saw the man, and stopped to help. The Samaritan bandaged the man's wounds, put him on his donkey, and delivered him to an inn, where he paid the innkeeper to take care of the man until the Samaritan could return (Luke 10:30-35).

This is a good and challenging story for us today, but it was astounding to Jesus's ancient listeners. The Jews hated the Samaritans. Their racism against the Samaritans went back centuries when the kingdom of Israel split. The Samaritans intermarried with foreigners and established their own temple to worship in. The Jews considered them an inferior race with a corrupt religion and viewed them with prejudice and disdain. But this is who Jesus was holding up as an example of loving our neighbor.

Jesus was crossing the divide. He reached across the cultural, spiritual, political, and racial divisions and calls us to do the same.

Jesus's love is fearless love that calls us and enables us to cross the borders, to tear down the barriers, to reach out above the disagreements. The fear that is driven out by love is the fear within ourselves. Love overcomes the fear of the other, who may not look like us or sound like us or share the same perspective or experience as us.

Maybe reaching across the divide begins in your family. Maybe in your home or neighborhood or workplace or community. Jesus calls us together into His loving presence and invites us to make room for all, whether we think they deserve to be there or not.

I invite and challenge you all to rediscover the overwhelming, all-encompassing, all-welcoming love of God in your life.

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