

The First Sunday after Trinity: June 6, 2021

“Loving Fearlessly”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

John writes, ***“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.”***¹

This month throws the word love around quite a bit. We hear it throughout the year of course; but, in June there is a targeted ramping-up of the word *love*. The airwaves, newspapers, and social media sites are saturated with competing definitions of love. Fronts of homes and businesses alike display opposing views of love, as the symbol of God’s promise to not destroy the world by a flood is defiantly waved in His face, all the while His Words are twisted in mock support of things clearly against His will.

But this false love is not the only type of love that sees an increase in press in June. There is more talk of heterosexual love and weddings. June comes on the heels of Memorial Day and just before July 4, where there is much talk of love for the country. As school ends, we hear of a great love for children and students. As summer begins there is much talk of love for one’s self. We have a picnic after our service this morning that was planned by the Board of Evangelism and Missions with a goal of sharing their love for the members of the congregation and providing opportunity to foster connection and growth of love between members that was hurt during this past year.

They way everyone talks about love, you would think we are back in February 14th. See Markie, love is not just limited to that one day a year. Everyone throws this word of love around, and the way it gets attached to the love of sinful pride makes me think of Inigo Montoya, “I don’t think that word means what you think it means.”

It cannot be assumed that we all have the same definition of love. Some people think of a warm feeling, while others think of "tough love." Some think of love as affection and care, while others see love more of a commitment with duty and loyalty and devotion.

¹ 1 John 4:16–17

Some consider it is loving to grant freedom, while others see love as that which instills discipline. Some think of love as an easy thing that one can fall in and out of just as easy as the wind changes direction, while others believe love is something that is a noble goal, but in the end just simply unattainable; an unreachable and unfeasible proposition.

However you define love, I want you to put it aside for the next few minutes. I want you to hear what the Scriptures mean by the word; specifically, what John means by love. Ancient Greek has eight different words for love. Koine Greek, which is the time period of the Greek used in the Bible, has four words for love. Outside of the Bible there are words for obsessive love, playful love, enduring love, and self-love. By the time of the Greek spoken and used in Jesus and New Testament Biblical writers, those words had fallen out of disuse, and were seen as parts of the way the four main types of love manifest themselves.

The four types of love spoken in the New Testament are eros, phileo, agape, and storge. *Eros* denotes passion, and is where we get our English word erotic. *Phileo* signifies an affection that is used between brothers, and can also be used with friends, often translated as beloved. It is where Philadelphia derives its name. *Agape* indicates a love that is selfless and one that has a warm regard and interest in another. It implies a satisfaction with someone or something. *Storge* refers to the love that is the natural affection between parent and child. It is the love that would be used in the sense when we talk of a father's love or a mother's love.

One quick side note is important here. There is not one love that is greater than the other. God fills all of these loves perfectly for you, as He uses different images to teach you the depth of His love—He calls you His bride and His child; Jesus even uses the terms friend and beloved. In the Gospel of John, just a few weeks ago, we heard of Jesus speaking of God's love toward us using the term *Phileo*, brotherly love; so let us be truthful and honest to the Scriptures and lovingly correct those who tout the idea that *agape* love is somehow God's perfect love.

That being said, our text from John does use the word *agape*. In this section of Scripture, God is highlighting an important aspect of His love for us. Remember I said that this love is one that has a warm regard and interest in another. This love is not so much of an emotion as it is an act of will. I am not saying that you will not feel *agape* love. I am saying that *agape* love persists even when you don't feel it, and it lasts beyond emotion

because it is a choice, an act of the will, and a commitment. It is also not simply internal, but it is chiefly seen in behavior – in words and especially in actions.

It is a love that is deeply interested in another. It is a love that not just wants to know about another, but truly and intentionally is attentive and involved in the betterment of another; not just in this earthly life, but for the life to come. It is not simply entranced with complying to make the other happy. It is not a love that revels in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth. It is a love that cares deeply enough for the other person to be truthful, open, and honest, even if feelings may get hurt. Because it has a warm regard for the other, it desires the other to not live in sin, but repent and come to the knowledge of the truth; repent and believe in the Gospel.

As Jesus loves us with *agape* love, His actions are easy to see. His warm regard and interest in us drove Him to speak the truth in love. Sinners are in need of repentance. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Jesus spoke the Law to sinners secure in their sins. When someone was so entrenched in their sin that they were flaunting it in pride for the world to take notice; when someone approached God in their sinful pride, demanding that God accept them for their works, on their own merits, Jesus taught the Law in its truth and purity. It is only for sinners that He has come to save.

Jesus' love for sinners had a high cost. His interest was so great in us that He knew He had to die for us. The only way out for us was if He got His own hands dirty – if He became one of us, and then fulfilled the Law of God as one of us and earned eternal life, and then died in our place, trading what He deserves for what we deserve, and thereby granting to us everlasting life. Because of His plan, and His self-sacrificing execution of the plan of *agape* love, our sins have been forgiven, and we have the promise and confident hope of a resurrection from our graves unto everlasting life.

The love of *agape* is a love of action. This love makes us like God – not just like God, with all the powers and knowledge and so forth – but like Him. As He is, so also are we in this world. We are like Him, lovers in the world. We are to be like Him, filled with compassion and acts of unwarranted goodness and unprejudiced love. This imitation of God, which we don't work up, but which flows out of love for God and from God, gives us confidence as we approach the Day of Judgment.

So we don't twist this unprejudiced love, let me be clear. We love all sinners. We do love all people. We don't love their actions. Loving someone doesn't mean you have to agree with them all the time. My wife doesn't always agree with me. That doesn't mean she doesn't love me. It is because she loves me, and is interested in my betterment, that she calls me out on my sin, tells me when I am wrong, and corrects me with God's Word.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is where this love gets even better, "***There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.***"² Because God loves us, wrong fear is eliminated. Being perfected in Christ, the new man fears, loves, and trusts in **GOD** above all things. There is a better Word. We can approach our fellow sinners, who are sinners just like us, and we can show them there is a better way. There is a more loving and perfect way. This is not just my idea, or better because I say so, but look here at God's Word; let's read it together. I am not afraid of being wrong, you shouldn't either. Let's read this thing together and speak the truth together in perfect love of God.

So, make the sign of the cross and remember your baptism. God is with you. There is much danger in living only for oneself in sumptuous lavishness. Your neighbor is laid upon your gates and has both physical and spiritual needs. Does Jesus not say, "***have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it,***

² 1 John 4:18

and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.³

I know this may sound as though a Christian will never feel any fear ever and this love will just bubble forth. That is not our experience as Christians. We live in a world of sin and evil. The devil is here to tempt us and life will confront us with pains and sorrows and frightening possibilities. Our own sinful flesh will betray us. We will feel fear and trouble because it will be real. But the love of God for us is our answer. We are not helpless in fear, nor do we live in fear constantly. We feel it, and the Holy Spirit turns us back to God's gifts of Word and Sacraments.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, "***We love because he first loved us.***"⁴ The font, the lectern, the pulpit and the altar all bear witness to His love for us. Our filled ears, hearts, and hands in turn bear witness in truth and love towards our neighbors.

It is here we learn and ever keep in front of us clearly just what love, true love, is. Only from God's love can we love others. We can't help it. We don't lock God's love up deep inside myself; it leaks like a sieve.

Because the sinful nature still clings to us this side of the resurrection, John adds, "***If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.***"⁵ We are called to love one another – fellow members of the same congregation first. We are to love one another no matter how we feel about one another. Then we love our fellow Lutherans – brothers who share the same confession and confess the same Lord and salvation. Then, we are to love all our fellow Christians. Then we are to love all people.

There is an order – it is not an order of importance or priority, but the order of proximity. Let's face it, if you cannot love the brothers you can see, the ones you have daily or weekly contact with, you cannot really love that imaginary soul off in the distance somewhere.

³ Matthew 10:26–40

⁴ 1 John 4:19

⁵ 1 John 4:20–21

I don't mean to suggest that others are imaginary, but the people you face each day are real, and those who you do not see exist for you only in your mind until you see them.

If you cannot love the flesh and blood realities that you see and hear and touch, then any love you may think you have for those who are far distant is imaginary, just as they are – only present in your mind. And *agape* love is never just in your mind. It is always in your words and actions.

Love starts with what we can see and touch; it starts right here at home, at this house of God, with the brothers and sisters right here at Immanuel. The first fruit in receiving the love of God in Christ through word and Sacrament shines forth in loving the person next to you. Then to love the person across the aisle from you, and the one at the keyboard, and the one in the pulpit, and those who were not able to make it here today, but have confessed their place in our fellowship, as members of this family and this body.

I didn't say that you had to feel good about them or even like them, but you do love them. You are interested and warmly regarded toward them. Consider their well-being, pray and encourage them. Whether or not they come back, whether or not they rejoin our fellowship or wander-off into their own works and definitions of self-love—you still love them.

Let us pray,

“Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit

Into ev'ry troubled breast;

Let us all in Thee inherit;

Let us find Thy promised rest.

Take away the love of sinning;

Alpha and Omega be;

End of faith, as its beginning,

Set our hearts at liberty.”⁶ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁶ Love Divine, All Loves Excelling LSB 700:2

Prayer of the Church—First Sunday after Trinity: 6 June 2021

Loving Father, You have kept Your promise to Abraham and brought forth the Offspring in whom all nations are blessed and counted righteous, even Jesus Christ, our Lord. Give to all people saving faith in this promised Savior, and work in them the love that flows from Your love alone. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give boldness and diligence to all ministers of Your Church, [*especially Matthew, our Synod President, Brian, our District President, and Sam, our Circuit Visitor,*] that they may proclaim the faith once delivered to the saints. Be with all vacant congregations and pastors considering calls. Send forth laborers into Your harvest, and sustain those You have sent. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, be the defender and shield of all in need: the poor, the hungry and those without homes or proper employment. Provide for their needs, and give them hope in the face of their trials. Stir up in us fervent love for one another, that we would be charitable to bring care and comfort to those around us, since You have shown us perfect charity in Your Son. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give wisdom and patience to all in authority [*especially Joseph our President and Kim our Governor*]. Let them serve with integrity — always for the benefit of those under their leadership, to the maintenance of righteousness, and to the hindrance and punishment of wickedness. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Lillian, Cayli, Julie, Helen, and Ruth*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Nina and Carl* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted *Ken & Laurie* during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Give to Your servants all that is needed for this body and life. Heal, strengthen and comfort the sick, the suffering, the sorrowing and the dying, and hear the prayers of all who call upon Your saving name [*especially Carmen, Susan, Zoey, Vernon, , Floyd Doughty and those we name in our hearts.*]. Teach us to pray so that our hearts may not be undone by anxiety and fear but rejoice in Your grace sufficient for our every need. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, maker of heaven and earth and giver of life, we thank You for all the mercies You granted to our sister in Christ, *Karen*, during her earthly life, especially for calling her to faith in Jesus Christ. Comfort the survivors who mourn her death with the hope of the glorious resurrection and a joyful reunion in heaven. Keep us mindful that we are mortal so that we will ever be prepared to die in the faith and finally receive the glory promised to all who trust in Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give repentance and faith to all who come to Your altar this day, that we not come seeking sumptuous earthly food, but discern Your holy body and precious blood for the forgiveness of sins and receive it in the unity of a true confession. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we implore You to rule and govern our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, that we may not, like the rich man, hear Your Word in vain and become so devoted to things temporal that we forget things eternal; but that we may serve those who are in need readily and according to our ability, not defiling ourselves with carousing or pride. In trial and misfortune, keep us from despair, and let us trust in Your fatherly help and grace, that in faith and Christian patience we may overcome all things; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**