

“The Depths of God’s Love”

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Opening Prayer

Welcome here to worship here at KUMC/PCUMC. It is our hope and prayer that you would find our church welcoming and God-fearing, and God willing that has been your experience thus far today whether you are a long time member or a new visitor. We are getting close to finishing our trek through the book of 1st John. 1st John, although it is a short letter near the end of the New Testament, certainly speaks volumes about how we as Christians should act. If you have been here for much of our time spent in this book then you will likely have noticed that the guy who writes it is always speaking about love, truth, and salvation. Chapter four, which is our main focus for today, is no different. However, before we dive into our main topic on how deep God’s love truly is, first lets go over the background of this book real quick.

The book of 1st John is one of five books that the Apostle/Disciple John writes from the Island of Patmos near the end of his life. These books are thought to have been written around roughly 90AD, or about sixty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. They are usually thought to be the last books of the Bible that are written, and they are written by John during a time when he is the only remaining disciple. By the time John writes this all ten of his fellow disciples (excluding Judas Iscariot for obvious reason) have already passed due to persecution of the early church. Specifically during Emperor Nero’s reign all of them are put to death. Meanwhile John has outlived the Apostle Paul, has seen several Roman emperors come and go, and has been exiled to this rocky outcropping known as Patmos in his old age because he was so influential in spreading the Gospel. All five of the books that John writes (Gospel of John, Revelation, 1st-3rd John) share some basic similarities. They are all concerned primarily about salvation through

Christ alone. They are all concerned about encouraging believers who are in the midst of persecution, reminding them of the reward they have in heaven through Jesus. They are all also concerned about making sure that false teachings are kept out of the church. In our reading from 1st John 4 we see that the first six verses we studied today have to do with that last point, with sifting out false teachings.

1st John 4:1-2 states “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.” In this case what John is referring to when he uses the term “spirits” are the teachings that people were preaching. What is common today was common back then too, that people would claim Christ’s teachings while actually preaching something completely different. Around John’s time period (and for sure shortly thereafter in the late 100’s) the Gnostic teachings would emerge. If you have heard of the “Davinci Code” from back in the day, the Gnostic gospels were one of the emphasized teachings in that book. People often wonder about these teachings from that time period and ask why they aren’t included in scripture... until they read them. Perhaps my favorite example comes from the end of the Gospel of Thomas, where Jesus makes Mary Magdalene into a man so she can go to heaven. (Yes, that is really in there, and yes it should be clear why we reject the Gospel of Thomas as scripture.) In today’s world, these false spirits and fake teachers still find their way in and still preach on a worldwide scale. The “Name It and Claim It” or “Prosperity Gospel” teachers come to mind. Perhaps even more sinisterly you have cults such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses or the Mormons who will claim to follow Christ, and they will call themselves Christians, but yet we reject their teachings. Why do we reject their claim? Well here in 1st John 4:2-3 we again read “By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and

every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.” Basically, John is saying that Christ is the main focus for Christians, that Jesus is God in human flesh, that it is only through Jesus that we find salvation. Cults such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons deny these truths. If you have questions about this I would encourage you to come and talk to me after, but to boil it down for you the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons do not believe that Jesus was God in human flesh. They do not, therefore, confess Him as Savior. Beloved Congregation, if anyone comes to you (including me!) and teaches you something different than what you read in scripture (that salvation is found in Christ, that it is by Jesus that we are saved, and that Jesus is God in human flesh) then you should reject that teaching according to 1st John chapter four. Why is this such a big deal? Because to adhere to any other teaching is to put oneself away from God’s saving love. It jeopardizes salvation. We don’t ever want to do anything that will harm our salvation, or do anything or teach anything that harms the salvation of others. (Jesus uses an illustration of being cast into the sea with a millstone.) On the topic of salvation, we see why God extends it to us in the first place in the main section of our reading. We see that God’s salvation is based out of love. Truth, and love.

In verses 7-21 in our reading today we got into the meat of John’s message to these churches. The core of Christian teaching is that God loves us, that He loves us enough to die for us, and that after we become His we show that love to others. 1st John 4:7 reads “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” Note that there are no qualifiers there. Showing love is not something that we are to give only to those whom we wish. Anyone can love the people they like. Family, friends, children, a spouse, people who treat us well, these are folks who (generally) are

easy to love. But there are no qualifiers here in scripture for us Christians. We are called to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44 “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you), to love our neighbors (Matthew 22:39 “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”), to love those who are poor or destitute (Zechariah 7:10 “Do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another”), to show love to all. This doesn’t mean that we agree with these folks, or quash the truth in their presence, or just give other people stuff because that sounds nice... no the love that we are called to show is to be the same as that which our Lord first showed us. Verses nine and ten read “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” We learned last week that we are called to show our love through deed and truth, know that our Creator showed us love in that same way.

Think about it Beloved, God loved you enough to send His Son to be the payment for us. This wasn’t an easy payment, nor was it a payment for something that the rest of us would see as fit. In our reading from Romans 5:6-8 we saw exactly what this looked like, and we see exactly why it is so marvelous. “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” We don’t earn our salvation. No human being is truly “good” in the eyes of God, because that would mean that they are sinless. We know the truth, that we all sin, and we have heard before that the consequences for our sins is eternal death. Hell. Yet the Lord loves us so much, that even in the midst of our sinful lives He is still willing to die for us. Do you see the depths of God’s love for you?

It is akin to the parent whose child is in prison for murder, and yet they still love that child. Only by God's grace do we enter into His love. Only by God's grace do we receive salvation that we did not earn, but it was provided for us anyways because He loves us. It is by receiving this love, this unearned gift of salvation, that we are transformed into something new, something that shows God's boundless love for others. The word for what we are made into is "Christians."

1st John 4:15-17 reads "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgement; because as He is, so also are we in this world." If you confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and He resides in you, then you are one of God's children. This means that you are an heir to His kingdom. This means that you are called to act lovingly and in truth in this world. Confession doesn't happen by word alone, but as we have learned also in truth and in deed.

"We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." Beloved, the Lord's love towards you is absolutely endless. You are worth His Son, Jesus the Christ, going to the cross so that we might spend eternity with Him. Yet we have to recognize that if we are truly His, then His love is going to exude from us as well. All throughout 1st John this is a goal, that every Christian would know that they are called to love as we first were loved. Practically what this means for us is that our actions need to back up our words. Do you love the Lord, but hold a grudge against someone? Then you need to fix that. Do you love the Lord, but yet you allow yourself to sin in ways that you know are wrong? Then

you need to be working on that sin. Do you love the Lord, but treat others as though they don't matter or are not your neighbor? That in itself is sin, and it is incongruent with who we are as believers. The depth of the Lord's love towards us is very great, and we can rest assured in that, but are we emulating that in our own lives towards our fellow man? I hope and pray that we are. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer