

By This We Know

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning, I'm Denise Yon. I'm part of the San Francisco Community Group and the Women Reading Women Group.

Today's scripture reading is from John's first epistle, chapter 4, verses 7 to 21, as printed in the liturgy. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

[1 : 23] No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

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. 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. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar.

[2 : 29] 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you for that scripture reading, Denise. Good morning, everyone. My name is Andrew. I'm one of the pastors here. If this is your first time at Christ Church, we welcome you.

We're so glad you're here. We'd love to get to know you in our coffee hour afterwards. Please stick around and learn more about our church. We're a church that exists to lead people into deeper relationships with Christ and his church through community and for the city.

And we'd love for you to know more about that, maybe even be a part of that. This morning we are continuing our series in the letter of 1 John, but will you join me in prayer before we get started?

Lord God, we come before you wanting to hear your voice in a very particular, specific way relevant to each of our individual lives and in a way that makes a difference in this world.

God, we know that we're supposed to love. But it's one thing to be familiar with what you say about love, and it's another thing to be formed by what you say about love.

[3 : 46] It's one thing to be saturated with what you've said about love, and it's another thing to be stirred by what you've said about love. And we pray for the latter. We want to be formed. Lord, we want to be stirred, and we know that apart from the Holy Spirit working here in this moment, that cannot happen.

So we ask for that, Lord. Would you grace us with your presence? Make us the people of love you've called us to be. Make us the people of love who know how much we are loved by you in

Christ.

Convince us of that truth and make a difference, Lord. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen. So as I just prayed, you know, coming in today's sermon, I was beginning to wonder if you'd all be tired of me preaching the same thing again and again and again throughout this letter, 1 John.

Love, love, love, love, love one another. Right? I have no doubt in my mind that all of you know this. Even those of you who are not Christians, even those of you who might not be familiar with the Scriptures, we at least know the teaching of Jesus that we are to love one another.

And not only do I know that you all know about this, but I know that for the most part, you all agree with this teaching of Jesus. Even if you don't necessarily agree with us about who Jesus is, you pretty much agree, right, that we're all supposed to love.

[5 : 07] Deep down, we all recognize that there's something ultimate about love. There's something right and good, even sublime and divine, about love. And this is why so many people, right, so many people gathered around and believed in Dr. King's dream.

So many people rallied around his message and his method, his commitment to radical love, right, unwavering love, his deep faith in love and the power of love to repair what is broken in this world, whether war or economic displacement or racial injustice.

According to King, you name it, and love could fix it. But my question for us today is if it's so simple, if it's so commonsensical, if we all know we're supposed to love, and if we all believe with Dr. King that love will change the world, why is there still such a shortage of love in this world?

Why is this world left still so unchanged? If we really believe in love, if we really believe in Dr. King's dream, if 60 years ago, in the 60s, when the Western world, you know, swung back and forth and nodded their heads in approval and their hearts were inspired by the song, what the world needs now is love, sweet love.

Why did 20 years ago the Black Eyed Peas sing, people killing, people dying, children hurt, you hear them crying, where is the love? Where is the love?

[6 : 31] And I was reading Dr. King this week in preparation for this sermon. He has a collection of sermons called Strength to Love, and one of those sermons is titled The Antidote to Fear. And he was saying, you know, he was talking about how back in the 60s, he was saying Russia fears America, America fears Russia.

He was talking about the Israelis and the Arabs, and he was really trying to say that the antidote to all of this is love. But now 60 years later, what has really changed?

Like what happened? Or what didn't happen? Now some of us might say that we've just believed in love in vain. Some would argue that Dr. King's dream was nothing but a dream.

That to love is to be vulnerable, and to be vulnerable is to be weak, and that the weak will always be swallowed up by the strong every single time in this world. Some would say that it's survival of the fittest, and while being social and communal may have its temporary advantages, ultimately it's about looking out for number one.

And so these folks would argue against Dr. King that love isn't the antidote, and they'd point to the record of history, because who are we kidding? Love? Ending all war? Ending all economic insecurity?

[7 : 43] Ending all racial injustice? Ending all justice? Maybe this describes you this morning. You've tried the way of love only to get burned, right? Only to get taken advantage of, and nothing to show for it, right?

And now you're like, no, nuh-uh, no more of that. I'm just going to do me. I'm just going to get mine. But still there are others of you who are holding on, and you would insist that the problem is not that we've loved in vain, but that we haven't loved enough collectively.

Love is the antidote. It's just that we need a larger dose. Not enough people have believed in the dream. Not enough people have caught the vision. Not enough people have taken and spread this medicine of love throughout the world, and what goes around has just not come around yet.

For these dreamers, it's just a matter of time, right? But meanwhile, we must stay the course, continue loving to the end. Maybe this describes you this morning. You're trying. You're trying so hard to live a life of love and service and care for this world, but you're tired, and you wonder when. Maybe you wonder if love really is the antidote. And perhaps many of you expect me, a Christian minister, to side with the latter group this morning, right?

[8 : 56] The dreamers, the hopeful lovers. But what the Scriptures teach about who is actually right between the love cynics and the love optimists is that it really depends on what kind of love we're

talking about.

What kind of love are we talking about? See, I think a lot of us take the meaning and purpose of love for granted. We just assume we all know what love is, and we're all on the same page about love, right? We see those lawn signs in our neighborhoods.

Love is just love, right? And I'm not saying that love is easy to define because it isn't. But if our conception of love is just this vague notion of sentimental feelings, warm affections, warm desires and delights and positive vibes, that's not the kind of love that's going to take us very far.

Ultimately, to simply believe in a vague, generic, sentimentalist, feelings-first kind of love is to believe in vain because the problems of the world are too big to be solved by ambiguous, positive vibes.

That may work for a season in places of privilege and plenty, but such general, generic human warmth has yet to prove itself self-sustaining and enough to alter the chilling cold of this cold, cold world.

[10:13] I mean, tell me, how many acts of kindness can raise all those unjustly murdered from the dead from Nazi concentration camps? How many reparations could ever make up for the disenfranchisement of the transatlantic slave trade and the collective trauma caused by white and Western supremacy?

How many positive vibes will it take, in the words of Samwise Kamji, to make everything sad untrue? How many positive vibes will it take to bend every historical injustice back to justice and even bring it into shalom?

Now, I'm not saying that acts of kindness and reparations and positive vibes are pointless. And I won't deny that the world has had many moments inspiring hope and celebration, but I will say that we cannot put all our hope in such positive vibes, such limited acts of love and justice.

Because apart from a supernatural power that can forever break the curse of sin and death upon nature as we know it, apart from a divine and transcendent intervention, the record of world history does not indicate, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the universe is moving toward it, is moving toward justice as opposed to injustice.

You know, the only reason why Dr. King could make such a claim that though the moral arc of the universe is long, it bends toward justice, is because he believed in the God of the Scriptures. He believed in the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

[11:41] There's a reason why the Black Eyed Peas, the Black Eyed Peas, they sang what? Father, Father, Father, help us. Send some guidance from above. So we can't do it on our own.

As much as we secular, Western, modern people want to believe we can fix it, we can solve our own problems, we can't. We can't. It's because when so much of the secular West renegotiated its largely Christian roots and decided to retain, love your neighbor but discard, thus saith the Lord. When we elevated the second commandment of Jesus to love our neighbors but made his first great commandment negotiable to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we unwittingly unmoored ourselves from the very source and origin of love.

And I know I haven't even gotten into the text yet this morning, but see, this is why this text is so important. It isn't just another religious rule telling people to love, which they already know. It is giving us the very basis, the very definition of love, without which we will never love as we ought. And without which the world will continue to be starved, starved for love, unchanged, and without hope for the abundant life that we all long for. See, we must not settle for love is love.

[12:58] What the world needs now is God's sweet love. Look at verse 7. Beloved, let us love one another. For love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. And what this is saying is that the grounds of our love for one another, the very source of our love, is and it has to be the God who is love himself.

Love is not this, you know, ambiguous, ultimate, impersonal substance, energy, force, or vibe that God, like, taps into and conforms himself unto. No, no, God.

God is love. He, the Father, loving the Son, and the Son, loving the Father from all eternity, with a passionate, committed, self-giving, mutual affection, the triune God, is love.

And not just one part of him is love, but all that he is is love. Like, all that he does is loving. Even those things that don't seem loving, like his judgment and his wrath, they are not the opposite of love.

[14:02] They are in alignment with who he is, and they come out of his love. Do you remember Jesus' anger in the temple? Right? His anger in the temple when they made his Father's house of prayer a commercialized thief, a den of thieves.

He fumed, right? He fumed with wrath. Why? Because he loved his Father. Because he loved his Father's glory. And because he loved those who are being taken advantage of in the temple. See, God is love means that all God's ways are love and that he is the very standard of love. He defines love more than love defines him. He's not trying to measure up to our varied and often convenient understandings of love.

No, any vague sense of love that we have is because we were made in the image of God, who is love. So you see, love isn't just what we make of it. It isn't just any expression we choose. It's so much more than the free expression of ourselves and our desires and the consenting reception of those expressions. It isn't just wide tolerance or a relativistic acceptance and affirmation of all things, just so long as it doesn't harm anyone.

[15:11] No, love is a specific act of self-giving and concern for others. That is, get this, modeled. Modeled after the God who is love himself and the God who has shown love to us in Christ.

Verse 9. See, love is the giving of real life.

It's what God showed people who chose death. It's what he showed us by sending his son, the light of the world, into our darkness. Verse 10 says, And see, love is not primarily about what we owe to God.

Love is primarily defined by what God has shown voluntarily, even surprisingly, toward us. When we brought sin and therefore the wages of sin, death into this world, he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation.

I know that's a big word. We talked about it earlier in the series, but let me go over it again. And propitiation is this satisfying atonement for our sins. He sent his righteous, innocent son to pay the wages of our sin with his own death.

[16:29] Not our death, his own death. To satisfy the demands of justice against all wickedness and unrighteousness. And see this, this is the gospel, real, real love.

The measure of all that we would call love. It's the sacrificial, self-giving activity of God to bring us life by the atoning death of his son, Jesus Christ. So can you see?

Can you see how much better, how much purer, how much stronger, how much more inspiring and powerful, how much more transformative the love of God in Christ is toward his people?

Love isn't some fluffy, permissive openness to anything and everything. Love is actually the upholding upholding of the highest standards of God and yet at God's own expense rather than ours.

And this is the gospel, right? This is the hope of the world, the only true love that can really transform the world, the only true love really worth believing in. Listen, the world will not be transformed one act of kindness at a time by people like you and me.

[17:32] Is anyone here willing to bet their life and the well-being of the whole world on our positive vibes outweighing our negative ones? No way. No way, right?

The transformation of the world demands a greater kindness, a greater, purer, stronger love, a love that can deal with the root problem, which is sin. The sin that runs through each and every one of our hearts.

The transformation of the world demands nothing less than God's love made manifest amongst us in Jesus Christ, who put sin to death on a cross and rose again in glorious life.

And see, thank God for that. Thank God because that means if we are followers of Jesus, our job is not to save the world by our limited acts and often flawed acts of love, but it's to bear witness to God's love, which can and truly will save the world.

Our job as children of God is to image and reflect the Father's love to the world, to love out of the deep, deep reservoir of love that the Father has deposited into each of our lives. Look at verse 11.

[18:35] Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. See, those who've been loved by God, we have no reason, no excuse, no rational explanation for why we should not love others.

But it's not just an obligation. It's not just an obligation to love others. It's an amazing privilege. And it's an amazing invitation. Verse 12 here, it says, no one has ever seen God.

And that reminded me of my daughter. You know, my daughter, Cammie, she's three, she's my older one, and she's in this phase right now where we'll be talking about God, and she says, but I can't see God.

How come I don't see him, Dad? And you know, I love how the children's catechism tries to answer that question. It says, can you see God? No, but he always sees me. And I always try to instill that in her, that God is still present, even when we can't see him.

And I remind her, I remind my daughters that, you know, we can hear God in his word, the Bible, even if we can't see him. But if I'm honest, I still get nervous and anxious every time my daughter asks this question.

[19 : 38] Because my worst nightmare is for my daughters not to have a real and abiding relationship with God in Christ. And so I'm always wondering as a parent, and as a preacher here, what can I say to convince her?

What can I say to convince all of you of the reality of God and his love for us in Christ? What words do I need to say? What conversations do I need to have? But you know, here in this text, in this verse right here, God reminded me that maybe it's not just about what I say to convince her. Maybe it's not just about what I say to convince any of you. But what if it's also a matter of how I love? How I love? Verse 12, See, love one another isn't just some predictable command in the Bible.

It's an invitation to enjoy and to expose the presence of the invisible God. Like, let that sink in for a second. When we love one another, God is there.

When we love one another, there is God. And not only that, but his love is perfected in us. What does that mean? I like to think of it this way. It's like God, who is love, writing the greatest story ever told, right?

[20 : 59] The greatest love story ever told. And not only did he write himself into the story as the heroic lover who would transform the world and turn the tragedy into something more beautiful than we could ever have imagined, but he also wrote sequels to the story.

Chapter after chapter of his love continuing to be expressed through his people like waves upon waves emanating from his ultimate one act of love in the crucified and risen Christ.

So my question is, is that not a story that we want to be a part of? Like, don't you want a chapter in this story of this ever-perfecting love? Don't you want to make the invisible God visible, more perceptible, his presence more closely felt?

Because that's what happens when we love one another. The unseen God is somehow made perceptible. Ask Maria Francis about this. She has seen it. For those of you who don't know Maria, she's our assistant director of ministry, and I've had the pleasure of working with her for the last two years.

And if you don't know anything about Maria, you really need to know, and she's given me permission to share the story of her and her husband, Pastor Mike. He sits back there. Hey, Pastor Mike. He lifts up his hands. He gives us amens, and we love him for that here at Christ Church.

[22 : 14] So as a staff, we got to hear more snippets of the story not too long ago, the story of Pastor Mike's, his heart attack, his bike accident, and his severe brain damage that resulted.

And man, I just got to say that that he is back there raising his hands, worshiping with us, walking, talking, and just here encouraging us is nothing short of a miracle.

So just two months ago, it was around Memorial Day, which is the anniversary of Pastor Mike's accident. We were sitting around our table on a staff day. We were eating our lunches as we do on a Tuesday, and we were listening to Maria just share as she was reflecting.

It's Memorial Day, remembering the nightmare that came upon their family, Memorial Day 2015.

And all the days and weeks and the months that followed, she just shared with us what she just went through.

And with teary eyes, she recalled the helicopter, right, airlifting Pastor Mike to the hospital. She recalled the long days of sitting with her unconscious husband, not knowing when or if he'd regain consciousness and with little to no expectation from their medical providers that he would even walk or talk again.

[23 : 24] She also recalled the jarringly altered husband who eventually woke up right next to her, agitated, uncomfortable, unable to form words or complete sentences.

But then she said something to me that I will never forget. After recalling awful detail after awful detail, Maria said with full conviction and true gratitude, but God is so good.

But God is so good. And she recounted to us the goodness of God, the love of God, the presence of God that she experienced, how? Through the people of God from day one of her nightmare. All the restaurant gift cards, all the rental property that was found for her next to the hospital, meals for months when they returned home, the way her church, it was called Emmanuel Presbyterian Church, which means God with us, right?

The way their church just held them. They literally went into the Francis home and they took out a wall and used some space from the garage and used the powder room and they created a handicap accessible shower for this family, a handicap accessible house for this family.

[24 : 37] And because of this, though the sting is surely still there and it won't finally be removed until Jesus returns to make all things new, because of the love of the people of God, Maria Francis, she will tell you that she experienced the very presence of God.

God with her. God loving her. And for that, she can say with confidence that God is good and that all his ways are love. And this is just one of the many chapters, many untold chapters, right, of the love of God perfected amongst his people.

So again, don't you want a chapter like that in the story that God is writing? Verse 13, by this we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit.

The spirit works this kind of love in us and we have seen and testified that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God.

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.

[25 : 55] As the God who is love is, so also are his children. And that's what I love about Maria's testimony of God's presence and love toward her in and through his people. It's not like these people from Emmanuel Presbyterian Church were just trying hard to meticulously adhere to religious rules from Jesus or else punishment, right?

No, they were just being who they were. Beloved children of God. Beloved children of God. And this is where I'll wrap up. Verse 18 says, 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. See, it is only the love of God. It is only the love of God that can inspire and motivate and sustain the love that the world needs.

A perfect kind of love that casts out all fear. It is only the love of God, the Father Almighty that can do that. A love that looks upon us with His fatherly approval and calls us His beloved children.

It is only the love of God, the Son, who is the propitiation for our sins, our confidence before God that we have nothing to fear because God has already satisfied the demands of His justice through Jesus Christ hanging on a cross in our place.

[27 : 10] It is only the love of God, the Spirit, the very presence of God willing to abide and reside within us, reminding us that God is greater than our hearts whispering into our ears that we have an Abba Father in heaven and thus empowering us to love fearlessly like He loves.

So if your takeaway from my sermon this morning is love more, love harder, either I have failed at preaching or you have failed at listening because again, the point is not primarily that we love but that God loves us.

That's the point. He is the source. He is the beginning. And as it says here in verse 19, we only love because He first loved us. We only love because He first loved us.

I love how this whole verse, this whole passage begins in verse 7. In the Greek it says, agape toi, agapomen, beloved love, beloved love.

Christchurch, do we believe in our belovedness? Do we believe God's love for us? It has to start there. It has to start there in our belovedness.

[28 : 24] You know, in seminary, I was this cocky kid like many of my classmates. I wanted to be noticed and recognized and known for my superior moral character and my amazing Christian, why are you laughing?

laughing. And my amazing Christian piety and my incredible gifts as a preacher and a leader and a theologian, right?

But a close friend of mine told me that the thing that most stuck out to her about who I was was none of these things. She told me that what really stuck out to her about me was that she could tell that I was really loved, that I came from a place, a community of faith, a family and friends, a group of people who deeply, deeply loved me.

And this left a profound impression upon me. Like, what if we were known not by our gifts, not by all the positive vibes we put out into the world, not even by how much we obeyed Jesus and loved others, others?

But what if we were known as people deeply and lavishly loved into the sturdiest kind of security and peace and calm without a trace of fear?

[29 : 42] Like, what if that was how we were distinguished from the world? Oh my gosh, those people are so loved. Those people must be so loved to live like that.

I mean, imagine a world filled with people so secure in the love of their Heavenly Father. Imagine a world where people weren't toiling to love but simply living out of the abundant love that God had poured out upon them.

Isn't that a great kind of world? Christ Church, behold the love of God, the only love that can save the world, shown to us in Christ and inviting us to perfect it in chapter after chapter until he comes again.

Let us therefore as loved and loving children of God go in the name of Jesus to love and serve this world. Thanks be to God, we say, right? Thanks be to God.

Will you pray with me? Amen. Wine together. Money to love and Mohen■ust and WARSH to love God to watch and relevance as loved