

1 John 4:7-5:5

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[0 : 0 0] Let us pray. Father, may the riches of your grace shine through the poverty of my words,! so that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts! may be pleasing and acceptable in your sight.

! O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer. Amen. You may be seated. So I'd love to add my welcome to Chris's, especially those of you that are fathers amongst us.

I hear it's Father's Day. At least this is what my children are telling me. I think it was just an excuse to have cinnamon buns. But I'm also sorry, fathers.

Between Trinity Sunday, a Bach cantata, and centennial celebration, it's not that we forgot about you, you just didn't make the podium. But that's life, isn't it?

And I want to offer a special welcome also to those of you that traveled from different various parts of the world to be with us in this pivotal moment in our life. You know that we have been thanking God for his faithfulness over the last 100 years, especially the last 33 years with David and Bronwyn.

[1 : 1 3] And now, today, we are looking forward to the next 100 years. And we love doing that together in the form of worship and prayer. And we want God to be our treasure and our savior and our sustainer for the next 100 years.

We want him to be our shepherd, and we want him to send us all the people that he wants to draw to himself here in Vancouver for the next 100 years. And as you know, as our habit here at St. John's, David has created a little tradition over a few decades where we just keep preaching books no matter what's happening in the world.

And I love that, because there's this conviction behind it that every portion of Scripture is applicable to every season of life because it holds out to us the Lord Jesus Christ, the holy hope of everlasting life with him and the love that he has come to shed abroad in our hearts.

And one John in particular, as we've been traveling through the first letter of John in this season, has been the right word in the right season, I think. Because John has this way of helping the church amidst all the chaos and the clutter and the decisions and the things going on, just to get focused on the main things.

John helps the church stay focused on the main things. Over and over again, he keeps coming back to two themes, believe in Christ and love one another.

[2 : 3 9] Over and over again, believe in Christ and love one another. And as we pick up in John 4, verse 7, he circles back for the third time to that theme of love.

He says, Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. In this passage, John mentions the word love 32 times in 20 verses.

It is the most concentrated and comprehensive discussion of love in the whole New Testament. And one might argue that love is the greatest theme of the whole New Testament, the love of God for us.

And so you might suggest that this is the greatest passage on the greatest theme in the Bible. And the wonderful thing about it is that John's point is not just that we should love one another. He's already said that before.

He's already said it. It's not just that we should love one another, not just in words, but that we should concretely, practically love one another with our lives. He's already said that. It's not just that our love for one another should be very different than the way in which the world loves.

[3 : 47] It should be something patterned after Christ, his selfless sacrifice. John's already said that. The point here in this passage is why should we love? Over and over again, John wants us to know here is why you should love.

And I think there's something very personal and pastoral and practical for us in this because I think John's just acknowledging love is hard. This is one of the great differences between humans and God.

God's love does not faint or grow weary, but human love does. And one of the biggest issues, I think, in loving one another is not just that we don't know how to love one another sometimes in certain situations, although that's the case.

Sometimes it's really confusing. Like, how do I love this person in this situation? But I think one of the biggest issues for us is that eventually we reach the limits of our capacity to love. We lack the will and the resolve and the inner power to love, and we reach this temptation point where we give up.

And so there's this question, why should we keep on loving when it's difficult to love and we reach the end of our capacity? And John, as he repeats, love one another, love one another, love one another, he gives us three reasons why we should keep pursuing the way of love.

[5 : 00] Number one, because God is love. Number two, because God has loved us. And number three, because God's love is in us. So number one, love one another because God is love.

Pick up in verse seven again with me, seven and eight. Let us love one another. Why? For love is from God. And whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Verse eight, anyone who does not love does not know God. Why? Because God is love. God is love. This is the fifth, the final, of five statements in the New Testament about what God is.

That's interesting. The first two statements are something in the ancient world that the Greeks would have been very happy to say. God is spirit and God is light. And the second two statements are something that the Jews would have been very happy to affirm in the ancient world.

God is one and God is a consuming fire. But it's this last statement that is the biggest and the boldest of them all and only the Christians ever dared to claim it. It's that God is love.

[6 : 07] Love is the very essence of his eternal nature. He is an exhaustible fountain and a shoreless ocean of love. And when we say God is love, it describes, I love talking about this on Trinity Sunday because it describes not only God's relationship to us, but it describes who God is in himself for all eternity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

One of the great early church fathers, Augustine, wrote one of the great first books on the Trinity. It's about 300 pages. You should get it. But it's worth mentioning on Trinity Sunday, he says there's no way the human mind can fully comprehend what John means when he says God is love.

But he says we do know that it includes all three persons of the Holy Trinity. The Father who is the lover, the Son who is the beloved, the one who is loved, and the Holy Spirit who is the bond of love between them.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit, lover, loved, beloved. Now it's just a human analogy. If you push it too far, it breaks down and goes into heresy all over the place. So don't do that. I think David warned us about that sort of thing at some point.

But what it tells us, it pushes us to dare to believe that God's holy life for all eternity past, all eternity future, is a perfect, undiluted, overflowing life of love.

[7 : 27] And John's point is that if we know God, then we know the source of all true love. And John says that you cannot claim to know God if you do not love others because God is love.

And anyone who knows the God who is love will have his love at work in their lives. So why should we love one another? John's first point, because you know God. And God is love.

And the second reason is John says love one another because God has loved you. Someone once said that some of us would dare to believe that God is almighty and he may do everything.

Some of us even dare to believe that God is all wisdom and he can do everything. But he said where some of us fall short is that we do not dare to believe that God is all love and he will do everything.

And here, John is telling us that God has held nothing back to save us. He has spared no expense. He has done everything he can to redeem us.

[8 : 33] And John talks three times of the great expression of God's love for the world as the sending, as the gift of his very own son. Verse 9, in this the love of God was revealed to us, was made manifest among us, that God sent his son into the world so that we might live through him.

Verse 10, 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.

Verse 14, and we have seen and testified that the father has sent his son to be the savior of the world. John's just really simply saying if we need to be persuaded that we are loved, we don't look anywhere other than Christ.

And if we need to be encouraged to keep loving one another, we don't need to look anywhere other than Christ. He has taught us how to love one another by loving us freely and joyfully and generously and sacrificially.

And his very love for us saves us from the lovelessness in which we were. And he draws us into his eternal love and puts his eternal love into us. Why should we love one another?

[9 : 46] Because we know the God who is love and we know the God who is love to us. And third and finally, because God's love has been put in us and is at work in us.

Do you notice throughout the book of John how there's all this abiding and dwelling language? And this is flying every direction. So God abiding in us and us abiding in God, him dwelling in us and us dwelling in God.

And I think it's connected in verse 13 to this reference to the gift of the Holy Spirit. God literally indwells us by the gift of his Holy Spirit.

And the first fruit of the Spirit is love. It's not just something that we see God doing outside of us. It's now something that God is doing inside of us. And that's why John uses the language of being perfected, of God's love being perfected in us.

Look at verse 12. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

[10 : 54] I mean, this is an astonishing thing to say. There's almost this implication, John is saying, that nobody's ever seen God, but something of God's love can be glimpsed in our love for one another because our love for one another comes from the fact that God's love is abiding in us and is being perfected in us.

Now, this is an amazing thing. John is not saying that God's love is imperfect and that he needs our human love in order to fulfill something in his love that's lacking. That's not what John's saying.

This word perfected is about something reaching its intended goal or purpose. So if I threw a football across the room right now, which would be great, and somebody in the back caught it, my intended goal and purpose of me throwing the ball was that it would be received and it would be caught by that person.

What John is saying is he's saying that there is a goal and a purpose to God's love for us. God is not satisfied simply for us to come to an awakening or an awareness that we are loved by him.

Although that is what he desires. He wants us to know that we are dearly and deeply loved and his love does not wax or wane, increase or decrease. We are fully loved in Christ Jesus through his death on our behalf.

[12 : 12] But John is saying there's another goal that God has in that. He wants his love to actually dwell in us and reach the goal of us coming to share his love for other people.

So he's not satisfied with us just knowing that we're loved. He wants us to share his love for others. And I think this is probably one of the greatest encouragements why John says when it gets difficult, just keep on loving that person who is difficult to love.

Because he's saying your love is not just a solo performance, something that you muster up on your own strength. He said your love for that other person is actually God doing a work in your heart where you are coming to love that other person with the love that he loves that other person with.

And this brings us all the way back to the fact that God himself is love. Not only is he the sole source of his love for us, but he is the source of our love for one another.

Isn't that a beautiful thing? All things come from God and of your own have we given you and to one another, Lord. Two brief applications as we conclude because I've been told I only have 15 minutes.

[13 : 31] It's an application for our life together now and an application for our life together over the next 100 years. And they're the same application. Love it.

That's great. Right now, what are we to do as a church? Some say we're in a liminal space or a waiting space or a praying space and what are we to do?

I think John would just say keep the main things the main things. Keep doing what you've done. Believe in Christ and keep on loving one another. But the reason I say this is because I think in this season we need to be really intentional about this.

We need to double down on this. Maybe triple down. Because one of the main ways that Satan will try to harm our fellowship and ministry in this season is to breed discord or confusion or frustration or impatience or resentment.

Find any way to erode our love for one another. And so we need to recognize that love is built over time but love can be broken in a moment. And we need to be faithful on our needs, thoughtful in our actions, intentional and wise with our words.

[14 : 37] Ask the Lord, is there someone who needs me to be intentional in loving them in this season? To see every decision as an opportunity to make a choice for love. To see every event as an opportunity to plan for the flourishing of love.

To see every conversation and meeting as a moment to encourage love. Every program, course, gathering, and opportunity for the growth of love. So what should we be doing right now?

Believe in Christ. He's got us. He's done everything for us. He loves us. And love one another. And for the next 100 years, what are we supposed to be doing for the next 100 years? We should probably believe in Christ and keep loving one another.

It was Jesus himself who said, by this the world will know that you are my disciples, all people. By your love for one another. See, love is important in and of itself.

Love needs no other reason other than God is love. But love is also a matter of great missional importance for us over the next 100 years. Our love for one another is part of our witness to Christ in the world, a tangible sign of his presence and his power in our midst.

[15 : 44] It's one of those things that the world knows it longs for and knows it needs but has no clue where to find it. And the church is called to be a beacon of light, a community of love, a city set on a hill, fueled by faith in the Christ who loved us and gave himself for us.

And so if we're to do anything for the next 100 years, let's keep the main things the main things. Let's not get distracted. Let's keep believing in Christ, loving one another, trusting that God's love is being perfected in us and that his power will do more than we can ask or imagine through us for the glory of his son and for the good of his church.

Brothers and sisters, this is our duty but more than our duty, this is our joy. I preach these things to you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen.