

Trinity I

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Date: 02 June 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Being raised in the American Christian culture, as a teenager I became quite cynical of those that were always crying wolf. Every several several years I would hear how the world was going to end. The 1980s was the continuation of the Cold War as there was a constant threat, fear of a nuclear bomb. The late 1990s was a time when mass school shootings and terrorism became prominent in the news.

The year 2000 was a time when people talked of the Y2K crash. 9-11 brought a feeling of threat, outrage with the rise and expansion of radical Islam. And of course in 2020 we were all forced into isolation because of the fear of COVID.

It is no wonder that the latest 2024 statistics on mental health report an increase of anxiety among Americans. 43% of Americans feel anxiety as compared to 32% just last year in 2023. 77% of Americans are very, very concerned about the economy. 73% are worried about the upcoming elections and the aftermath. And 70% of Americans are very concerned about the rapid cultural shifts in our country.

But for the Christian, there is an answer to all these anxieties that we are facing. And I believe our epistle text here in 1 John chapter 4 spells this out quite clearly. So what is the answer to all the fear we are witnessing today? Well, it's not putting our head in the sand and pretending that everything is just fine. No, we are facing major cultural shifts that are doing great harm to our souls and our psyches.

We can't just ignore the rapid changes that are taking place. But there is light. There is hope for all who listen to what the Lord has to say. So what's the answer?

[2 : 3 7] Well, the answer is love. Now I can imagine a bit of eyes rolling. I would be one of those. And the thought of that. Here we go again. But hear me out. When I say love is the answer, I'm not talking about sappy sentimentalism that is often called love. That's not even love. That's pie in the sky drivel.

I'm not talking about love as a mere affirmation or endorsement for mass sexual perversion and rebellion against God. That's not love. Friends, love does not flow from your heart. It doesn't.

Love is not a mere feeling nor is it an affirmation of everything and everyone. That's not love. Love flows from God because God is love. Love flows from God because God is love. That's what 1 John chapter 4 says.

And that is why St. John, what St. John is saying, it is the Lord, however, who demonstrates, it's the Lord who defines what love truly is.

Our culture, our own experience do not give us a proper understanding of love. It gives us a very distorted view of love. St. John informs us about three aspects of love here in our epistle reading this morning. First, he says, love is a gift received from God. Love is a gift received from God.

[4 : 3 3] Second, love is then a gift shared with others. Love is then a gift shared with others. And finally, true love casts out all fear.

We read in 1 John chapter 4 verses 9 and 10. In this, the love of God was manifested towards us, that God has sent his only begotten son into the world that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and he sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Friends, love is the act of God on our behalf. We share in the eternal love of the three persons of the Holy Trinity by receiving the second person of the Trinity, Jesus.

Jesus was sent by the Father so that we might live in him and through him, that is Jesus. So how do we live through him? How do we live in him? It is by the son of God's ultimate act of love in laying down and offering himself for us, laying down his life for us.

We read in 1 John chapter 4 verse 14, And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world.

Jesus came to this earth to seek and to save us from a life of sin that leads to eternal separation from our God. Friends, the Savior is Jesus.

[6 : 24] The Savior is Jesus. It's not the state. It's not the CDC. And it's certainly not a country that calls evil good and good evil, to quote from our Old Testament text from Isaiah chapter 5 this morning.

So how are we connected to Jesus, who is the Savior of the world? Well, the next couple of verses spell this out for us. We read in verses 15 and 16 of 1 John chapter 4, Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God.

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him.

You see, Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. And you and I are accounted as those that are lost, that have gone astray from our God.

But in placing our trust in Jesus, we are acknowledging our sinfulness. And we are embracing our Lord as the only antidote to our sin.

[7 : 45] Because Jesus is our Savior. Jesus came to make atonement, to take away our transgressions by his own sacrifice on the cross.

And that's what the word propitiation means. That's why the Savior came. He came to offer his own life in love for you and for the world.

But belief does not mean we merely acknowledge or assent intellectually to this loving sacrifice. According to John, it means we abide in his love.

Abiding in God is listening to his voice. With all the other voices out there, listening to his voice in Holy Scripture. And then seeking to do what he says.

Abiding in God means receiving his mercy and grace in the sacraments. And then living out that faith by trusting in him.

[9 : 00] It means we submit to his rule over our lives. That's what it means to say or confess that Jesus is Lord. Knowing that when we try to be our own Savior, when we try to be our own Lord, what happens?

Because anxiety and chaos ensues. So we receive love from God, who is love.

But this love is then to be extended. It's meant to be shared with others. We read at the end of our epistle text the following words here in verses 20 and 21 of 1 John chapter 4.

Malice, rage, retribution.

This is not the way for the baptized Christian. We are called to love not only with our lips, but in our lives, as we say in the liturgy.

[10 : 26] This love that was shown to us in the atoning sacrifice of our Savior. This love is to be extended sacrificially to others.

If we see others in need, we are to get out of our comfort zone and help them. If we see others in despair, we are to lift them up.

If we see others who are terrified by the uncertainty of the future, we are to give them the hope and the power of the cross of Jesus Christ that bestows life and comfort.

In the words of our gospel text, we are to seek out the Lazaruses who have been abandoned by the world, but who are precious in the sight of God.

So the love received, the love that is the love that is the love that casts out all fears.

[11 : 31] We read in our epistle text again in verses 14 and 15 the following. Love has been perfected among us in this, that we may have boldness.

That we may have boldness in the day of judgment. Let me repeat that.

There is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out fear because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

The old fire and brimstone preaching that often characterized much of early American revivalism, in my humble opinion, was nothing more than emotional and psychological manipulation.

Because it did not reveal the true nature of who God is. God is love and his property is to what?

[12 : 37] To always have mercy. Beloved, the three persons of the Holy Trinity extend their love to us through Christ so that we do not have to fear.

We do not have to be afraid any longer. As Hebrews chapter 4 verse 16 reminds us, We can come boldly to the throne of grace because of the atoning sacrifice, the blood that covers us in Christ Jesus.

Our sins have been removed by Christ. We abide in him as baptized Christians who listen and then seek to obey his voice.

And the Lord promises to abide in us. And our standing before the God who loves us so much that he gave his own life for us.

That he sacrificially gave everything for us. Friends, no matter what happens to you in this life.

[13 : 56] Nothing will ever separate you from God because you are in Christ Jesus. Therefore, take your anxieties.

Take your worries to the throne of God and lay them before him. Turn off the fear-mongering loud mouths that profit from chaos and fear.

The God who came to offer his own life for you is your only comfort and hope. God loves you.

God loves you. And sharing then his love with others will give you great joy as you redirect your heart and your mind from all the fear.

Turning away from all the gloom and doom and living in the hope and the joy of the cross of Jesus Christ. And in receiving God's love and in sharing God's love with others, we are no longer captive to the anxieties and fears of this world.

[15 : 11] Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.