

Hopkins South Monterey

United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

April 25, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

1 John 3:16-24

16 We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. 19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Prayer & Sermon

*God of love and new life,
Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.*

Just about every Romantic Comedy movie ends with some grand gesture that tells and shows of the main character’s love for their partner. Do you have a favorite grand gesture from a movie? What is it?

There's Objecting at weddings, shouting over a loudspeaker, running through an airport, making a public scene, proposing marriage, an apology speech, a flash mob, a heartfelt letter, offering to give up everything. The list goes on. Perhaps you have experienced one yourself! The Grand Gesture is so common in Romance movies after one side doesn't think the love is true or thinks the way the other is acting means they don't mean it. The main character always comes to believe it after the Grand Gesture as they see the love in its full truth and action. Though it isn't talking about big romantic gestures, why those romantic gestures have the impact they do is one of the main points of today's scripture--the power of love that is acted upon.

It is said that this letter, 1 John and the rest in the collection, 2 & 3 John, are written as a response to the Gospel of John. Much of these letters give some explanation or application of the teachings of the Gospel of John. The letter of 1 John has three main themes, God is light, God is just, and God is love. The letter circles around the same points multiple times, really emphasizing the importance of those themes and the ways they interlock. 3:16-24 is part of the God is Just section, and is the second half of a discussion on who the true Children of God are, or what the essentials of being a Christian are. The main point that the letter drives home is the way that love is central to being a Child of God.

That love central to our faith, comes from Jesus. An almost direct response to John 3:16, "For God so loved the world He gave His only son...." 1 John 3:16, "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another." John 3:16 tells us of God's love and 1 John 3:16 tells us how we should love one another because of God's love. That brings us to verse 17, a message that isn't so different from other Gospel lessons, but perhaps a bit more to the point. "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" This is a convicting question that holds enough for a whole sermon alone. Verse 18, explains what is meant behind that question, that love is so much more than just a word or just something we say, but love is about truth and action together. We are called to actually love others and we are called to act on it. Those two things must come together and when they do, we can be reassured that God is happy with what is in our hearts. This part in verses 19-20 is often used as a fear tactic warning people to be so careful with what is in your heart, because God knows all! Though this warning is technically true, using the text of 1 John to make people afraid of God is not true to the heart of the letter. Verse 20 uses the phrase "whenever our hearts condemn us," it is inevitable, we will not be perfect all the time at living out love in truth and action. We will have moments that we fail at it or make the wrong decision or allow the temptation to be petty or selfish take charge. To that inevitability, the verse continues, "God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." God is greater than the swaying of our hearts, God's Will is greater than our mistakes, God's grace and mercy is greater than any sinfulness in our hearts. Our hearts are not forever condemned or eternally judged. Yes, God knows our mistakes, but God equally knows when we are living it out and holding to love in our hearts. If we resist the temptations, and stick to loving in truth and action, then we can receive God's help and guidance as we seek it.

Remember that I said 1 John likes to circle back on the points it makes. So, with verse 23 we come back to where we started, why we love others so actively. It is how we live out the two main commandments that Jesus told us. We should believe in Jesus as God's son, Love God, and love one another. Being a Christian means believing in Christ, and loving God and neighbor. When we live into those commandments, which we were previously reminded means not just in word only, but in truth and action, then we will abide with God and God will abide with each of us through the Spirit.

Through the spiraling message written in this letter, we are reminded of the core of our Christian faith. God so loved us that he gave us his only son, who showed the ultimate form of love by being sacrificed. Jesus was killed for his commitment to loving the people, all people, including the marginalized, even at the expense of holding to the rules to a T. Jesus's love defines the model for how we are called to love. Love is to be shown and lived out with our whole selves. We live out love with truth and action, which is a way we choose to live. Yes, our hearts may be tempted away from living out love, but we get to choose how we act on those temptations. That is the good side of love being about action, we can fight those inner temptations or inclinations and act out of love. As we choose to act on love we live out 1 of the 2 main commandments. But as we live into love modeled after Jesus, we are abiding in God and receive the blessing of God abiding in us. So, God loves us so sent Jesus to love us, who taught us to love with truth and action, which is a big part of loving God and neighbor. As we live into those commandments we abide more and more with God which by the Spirit helps us to continuously grow and transform into being and living out our identity as a Child of God.

This cycle is shared in more poetic words with the familiar Psalm, Psalm 23, another of the texts I could have preached on today. You have probably heard this psalm many times at funerals, but when we listen, there is more to it than just a comforting message.

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

3 he restores my soul.

[God so loves us]

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake. **[The right path of loving God and neighbor]**

4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—

they comfort me. **[When I am the one in need, I am brought help]**

5 You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows. **[I am called to love beyond all else, even my enemies]**

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long. **[When we dwell in the house of the Lord, living out
goodness and mercy follows.]**

Now that we have spun around this Love merry-go-round a few times, what does this mean for us in our day-to-day going forward? The central point of this segment of the letter is verse 18: “Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” I started this sermon by talking about the Grand Gestures in RomCom movies. I think that is how we often think about acting on love. Big emotional moments, declaring what was already felt and perhaps already known. We think of acting on love by doing a favor or sending a gift to a friend or planning a date for your significant other or spouse. Those are all great ways to put love into action. But this text calls us to think bigger. That convicting question in verse 17 gives us the breadth of the scope of who we should be loving with action: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” To use some more modern term, “How can we believe that God’s love is leading the heart of anyone who has privilege but doesn’t do something when they see a neighbor in need?” Jesus gave his life for us, can we give even a little of what is ours to another to help them? We are to love all those in need, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. Action can look a lot of different ways, as it should depending on the situation and the person. For some the help they need is immediate, they need food and water or a coat to keep out the cold. For others the help they need is a shoulder to cry on or someone to give them a hug of support. Though for many more the help they need is a lot bigger than an easy fix or a bandaid. We have many marginalized groups in our country and in the world that call out in need of help. Conversations around social justice and dismantling systemic issues have become more common in recent years. This work has been in response to and sharing the message that there are groups that our society has been claiming are equally loved, but when it comes to truth and action, the claims of love fall flat. It is not true love for our neighbor if the claims of love are not followed up by action.

As individuals we cannot act on every single need in the world or even our community. The truth of it is, all of us are the ones needing care and love often enough. We cannot only give and give and give. And we cannot fix all the world’s problems as one person. That is where the church comes in. We gather as a Christian community for many reasons, but probably the largest part of it is that together we can help each other do faith. Together we can do more to love others than we would be able to do on our own. Think of the Food Pantry that wouldn’t be possible to help those with food insecurity in Hopkins without many volunteers and donations. Together we can help each other grow and keep each other accountable to where we have felt God calling us. As a church family we can act on love and help those in need in bigger ways. AND! We know that our church family is part of the Christian family which we trust is working around the world for those in need. The Christian family should together be living out the reminder of Vs 16: We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. What a different world we would live in if

everyone were to focus on loving one another to the point of laying down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If we all work on loving with truth and action together, the more we invite God into our midst and the more we will see God at work among us and in the world. We will probably never be perfect at it, but God knows our hearts and understands our intentions. God knows what obstacles trip us up in acting on love and will help us get them out of the way if we let God in. We are not in this alone and we are given the blueprint. As 1 John 3 reminds us, Children of God, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. Let us live out his greatest commandments, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. As we obey in those commands, we abide in him and God abides in us. Let us welcome the Spirit to abide in us and listen as the Spirit opens our ears to the needs of those around us and opens our hearts to love them with truth and action in return.

Let us pray.

We grumble and complain about our daily lot in life. We read the newspapers, watch the broadcast news and moan about the evil which flourishes in the world. And we wonder, "Where are you, O God?" We turn our backs on the needs of the poor or give only a cursory acknowledgment of their plight. We throw our hands up in the air and act as though we are defeated. And we cry, "Why isn't God taking care of all this?" Forgive us, patient Lord. Forgive our arrogance, our ignorance, our pettiness. Forgive us when we could have done something to help someone else, but chose instead to turn away. Forgive us when we, by our attitudes and language, our thoughts and actions, have gone against your will. You are with us, Lord. You lead us daily in right paths and offer to us the bread of life. You stand with us in times of trial and in the presence of those whom we fear, giving us your abundant love. And then you offer to us a place in your eternal home. How can we doubt your presence? Help us to trust you. Help us to praise you and remember that you have called us to be your witnesses and workers in this world. Give us strength and courage, joy and peace for all the work that you have for us to do. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for us, his sheep, we pray.

In the midst of all that you fear, God is with you. God will not abandon you. Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, laid down his life for you and offers you hope and peace. AMEN.