

Summerland United Church
August 18
All of my Days: Letting Go

Prelude

Welcome & Land Acknowledgement

Threshold

As we move into times of prayer and devotion, we are often faced with the distraction of things that are worrying us, that are demanding our attention and focus. Letting go of these worries, even for a little while, is a practice of trusting God. This week we will hear how the 1st century Christians understood that to trust God was to remember that they were and are beloved by God. Called to Abide with God because of love, gave them, and us the ability of 'let go and let God', all of our days.

Scripture: 1 John 4: 7-2, selections

Reader: (before Scripture is read) Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth metaphor or story, listen for the meaning it holds for you on this day.

Beloved, let us love one another because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten of God and has knowledge of God.

Those who do not love have known nothing of God, for God is Love.

God's love was revealed in our midst in this way: by sending the Only Begotten into the world, that we might have faith through the Anointed One.

Love, then, consists in this this: not that we have loved God, but that God has loved us and has sent the Only Begotten to be a gift for our goodness.

Beloved, if God has loved us so, we must have the same love for one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet if we love one another, God dwells in us, and God's love is brought to perfection in us.

We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love and those who abide in love, abide in God, and God in them.

Love will come to perfection in us when we can face the end of our days without fear – because our relation to this world is just like Christ's. There is no fear in love, for perfect love drives out fear.

We love because God first loved us. Anyone who says they love God but hate their sibling or neighbour is a liar. For they cannot love God whom they have not seen, if they hate their neighbour who they have seen. If we love God, we must love our siblings and neighbours as well; we have this commandment from God.

Reader: (after Scripture is read) May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflection: My Hebrew Bible teacher in seminary taught us all something very important about interpreting scripture. She said, when reading a piece of scripture look for the repeated words, phrases and ideas, because repeated words would likely provide you with an idea about what the writer intends for you to pay attention to.

So, does anyone want to guess what word or concept the writer of first John wants us to pay attention to? Yah, Love. Anyone want to guess how many times the word love is written in this passage? 27.

27 times. In 14 sentences. So, it's pretty safe to assume we're supposed to be considering love as important to pay attention to. And, given that the word God is written 23 times in these 14 sentences, we can probably assume that God's love is what we're meant to focus on here.

The 1st letter of John was likely written in the late 1st century and while it probably wasn't written by the Gospel of John writer, it was heavily influenced by that Gospel. At this time in early Christianity certain theological beliefs about Jesus were creating vast divisions within the community. Divisions that would spark furious and ever violent clashes for centuries, up to this day.

One side believed that Jesus had come in the flesh – as in he was fully human during his life on earth. The other side believed that Jesus only *seemed* human but was in fact fully divine during his time on earth.

The Johannine community held to the former – Jesus had come in the flesh- we hear these words in Chapter 4 of this letter. We also hear these words in the opening of the Gospel of John – And the word became flesh and lived among us.

And so, this letter is to those who side with the notion of Jesus being fully human during his life on earth and reminding them that Jesus came to earth as a fully human being was because of God's love and because God loved the world.

But then it gets a little tricky. Because, as humans do, we dug our sticky fingers into it. We are, by nature, a community-oriented species. Some might say tribal even clannish. In times of trouble and strife we close ranks and can get very picky about who is 'in' and who is 'out'. In times of abundance and fortune we are more open to who we 'allow inside'. But throughout history humans have defined themselves by what group they belong to.

And we need to remember that Jesus' notion of the Kingdom of Heaven was meant to break down those barriers, to insist that everyone on the planet were members of the same community and we needed to define our communities and our very humanity by who we include, not exclude.

Barely two generations after the death of Jesus, his followers are getting it mixed up and creating exclusion based on some pretty dubious theology. And Jesus's followers will continue to get it mixed up for the next two millennia – it's why we have a United Church, a Baptist Church, a Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal church, among others, here is Summerland and all over the world.

Now, I'm all for different ways of expressing faith – I think that's what all our different denominations do – we sing different songs, we pray in different ways – and these different ways speak to the hearts and souls of humanity. Just in the same way some people love Jazz, or classical, or rock music and others don't. And I'm perfectly happy to have these different denominations expressing their faith in the way that works for them. I'm not going to ask them to change – I don't want them to ask us to change.

But what I want to make sure is – at the root, at the core of our faith are we, to the best of our abilities, practicing our faith in line with the teachings of Jesus? Are we considering what he meant by the kingdom of heaven here on earth? Are we considering the 'new commandment' given to us by him in the Gospel of John (13:34) *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*

The passage we heard today is a direct reflection of the early Johannine community on this passage, it is the commandment John speaks of at the end of this passage.

The theme for this week is about trusting God and letting go and letting God. And at my first read of this passage I struggled a little to see how this was a passage about that. I did get there eventually, and I'll share with you how I did that.

We had a service last week at St. Stephen's church and it was pretty different to be there. They do things differently, their set up is different, even some of the words they use for things are different. For example, when they refer to the church, they're speaking of the stone building only and then the church hall for the hall, the offices and kitchen etc.... Whereas for us, we refer to our entire building at the church and this space we're in right not the sanctuary of the church. Semantics, yes? Possibility of confusion in later conversations, likely. Something to get grumpy about? Not really.

But when we're uncomfortable, when everything is new, different and we don't know exactly what's going on, or what people mean – we can get anxious, and anxiety can stir up fear and fear makes us close inward, into ourselves, into our known spaces, into what is comfortable, often driving others out and pushing them away.

So, I come back to our passage today about Love – and the line that says - *Love will come to perfection in us when we can face the end of our days without fear – because our relation to this world is just like Christ's. There is no fear in love, for perfect love drives out fear.*

Perfect love is not easy for us humans, but I think we are capable of coming really close to it and trying to act from a place of love, speak from place of love, live in a place of love, rather than fear, we do a much better job of being in community together, even when things are different. When we do this, as our passage today says – *when we love one another, God dwells in us, and God's love is brought to perfection in us.* Love begets love.

God is love and those who abide in love, abide in God, and God in them.

If we look out into our community and see God in others and if we love God, then we can't help but feel some love for the person looking back at us.

We love because God first loved us. If we love God, we must love our siblings and neighbours as well; we have this commandment from God. "To love one another as I have loved you."

When we know this, I think it becomes easier to trust God. If we make our *pause prayer* this week to be 'love' and keep in mind as we pray the word love – that love overcomes fear and that love will help us deal with the unknowns. If we can trust that the love of God and our love for God, will see us through the tough times and the stickiness that is being a part of a human community, then we can let go and let God. All of our days.