

"Love in Truth and Action"

Easter 4B, May 3, 2009

I John 3:16-24

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I John 3:16-24

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us - and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 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? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

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. 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.

Abide.¹

"Abide in me," Jesus is quoted in the gospel of John.

"Abide in me as I abide in you."²

Wait with me, he requests.

Endure with me.

Bear patiently with me

And Christ will wait with you.

Jesus invites us into eternal life,

Where there are many abiding places.

Mansions sound much more glorious

And make for better choral titles,

But the better translation is "abiding places."

"In my Father's house there are many abiding places."³

Where I am, so are you.

Where you are, I'm there with you.

That's our Lord's promise.

We wait,

We endure,

We bear patiently

Together.

The snippet of a sermon we hear this morning from I John

Makes it quite clear that the dwelling in eternal life

Is not only a promise for the future,

But is a promise for the present as well.

"All who obey his commandments

¹ For this thought process, I am indebted to David Bartlett, Professor of New Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA. His commentary can be found at www.workingpreacher.org

² John 15:5

³ John 14:2

abide in him,
 and he abides in them
 by the Spirit that he has given us."⁴
 Eternal life is not something we strive for in the future.
 It isn't a goal to obtain in life.
 Eternal life,
 Abiding in Christ,
 Is available for each and everyone of us
 Right here
 Right now.
 It's ours for the claiming.
 We stake our claim,
 We make our claim
 Simply by believing in the name of his Son Jesus Christ
 And by loving one another.
 That is God's commandment.
 Believe in Christ
 And love one another.
 That is how we abide with Christ
 And have Christ abide in us.

Last Sunday
 We opened the dialogue about love
 From a preceding chapter and verse from I John.
 Today, love is expanded just a little bit further.
 "We know love by this," we begin this morning,
 "that he laid down his life for us."
 The love that we're talking about
 - Christian love -
 is intimately linked with the sacrificial love of the cross.
 God's love goes so far
 That he is willing to sacrifice his own son.
 Now, that's love;
 Giving up your own son
 On behalf of the world.
 Those of us who are parents
 Instinctively react with,
 "What was God thinking?
 Give up your own Son?
 I'd give up my own life first
 Before I'd give up any of my children!"
 The cross, therefore,
 Is the expression of God's love for us.
 It is God giving up the cosmos,
 And more,
 Just for you.

There is no greater love.
 And God's love abides
 In us

⁴ I John 3:24

When we turn that love around
 And lay down our lives for one another.
 The understanding of love
 Is expanded even a little bit further.
 The love of the cross
 Is connected with our love for our sisters and our brothers.
 Just as there was no limit to the love of God on Calvary,
 So, too, must we love without limits.
 So we get taken advantage of ...
 Our response is to love again.
 So someone takes their share and more and runs away from home ...
 We continue to love and wait patiently for their return.
 So our love is returned to us as evil ...
 We don't stop, we don't slow, we keep on loving
 With the same passion as Christ's Passion,
 And in doing so,
 We abide in Christ,
 And Christ abides in us.

Finally, I would add,
 John clearly commands us as tenderly as possible,
 "Little children,
 let us love,
 not in word or speech,
 but in truth and action."⁵
 Words can only take us so far.
 If words aren't followed up with action,
 Words turn on us,
 And reveal us as hypocrites.
 When we limit the love of God that flows through us,
 When we ration it as if it were in short supply,
 When we portion it out according to our priorities,
We are offending the cross of Jesus Christ.
 The old adage, "love begins at home," is one such example.
 This is a useful excuse for us not to reach out beyond our family or our neighborhood.
 Love doesn't begin at home.
 Love doesn't begin overseas, either.
 Love isn't regional.
 Love begins at the Cross of Jesus Christ.
 The love of the Cross is universal.
 Christ's love through us knows no boundaries,
 And the moment we try to limit it
 Is the moment we make the choice to stop abiding in Jesus.
 It is as if the author of I John knows immediately what our protest would then be:
 "How can we, humans who are born with limitations, love without limits?"
 "Beloved," John begins,
 "if our hearts do not condemn us,"
 that is to say, if we love without limits
 to the same extent that Christ loves us,
 "we," he continues,

⁵ I John 3:18

"have boldness before God;
 and we receive from him whatever we ask."⁶
 There you have it.
 We receive from him whatever we ask.
 We are human vessels,
 The limited conduit
 By which the unlimited love of God flows.
 It isn't us who does the giving,
 It is God giving through us that makes the supply endless.
 We only ask God to turn the spigot on.
 Open up the floodgates.
 And we will receive what ever we ask.

I John is written in part
 To add meaning,
 To add texture to the Gospel of John;
 That we should believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ
 And to love one another just as Christ loves us.
 Though we are battered by the storms of life
 Believe in Jesus.
 Be the means for his love to flow into the world.
 Abide in Christ
 That the limitless love of the cross
 Might be in you
 And flow through you.
 Abide in Christ.
 And He in you.
 That is the only way the wind and the waves of this world
 Will be stilled, will be calmed, will be quieted.
 "Abide with me;" wrote Henry Francis Lyte
 three weeks before dying of tuberculosis.
*"Abide with me fast falls the eventide;
 the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
 When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
 Help of the helpless,
 O abide with me."*
 Amen.

⁶ I John 3:22a