

THROUGH JESUS WE HAVE LOVE**Lamentations 3:3:22-24; 1 John 4:7-21**

Intro: It was quite a number of years ago and we had a daughter (I'm being purposely vague in order to protect the guilty) who DESPARATELY wanted a dog and she was on a mission to procure one. She researched the best breeds for a house dog, making sure they were hypoallergenic and, most of all, didn't shed. She researched dog expenses like vet bills and what the best and healthiest dog food would cost, etc (no small dollar amount) and proclaimed that she would pay every penny of it (even though she was barely a teen and had no employment). She finally settled on the Yorkshire Terrier which fit all the specs, and then she settled into a long and drawn out campaign of lobbying for Kathy and I to buy said puppy. I say campaign but it was actually more like Chinese Water Torture which Wikipedia describes as *"... a mentally painful process in which cold water is slowly dripped onto the scalp, forehead or face for a prolonged period of time. The process causes fear and mental deterioration on the person being tortured. The pattern of the drops is often irregular, and the cold sensation is jarring, which causes anxiety as a person tries to anticipate the next drip."* (End Quote) Actually that describes the onslaught we received – and like the victim of the water torture who eventually succumbs and gives up, so did Kathy and I.

Unbeknownst to our relentlessly persistent daughter, we began researching Yorkies for sale and we settled on one in Ravenna. About two weeks prior to Christmas, on a day when she was spending an entire Saturday with a friend, Kathy and I and her sister drove all the way to a far our rural address east of Akron and picked out the perfect little male pup from a very cute litter. We made arrangements with the kennel owner for her to keep the pup until after Christmas when we would pick him up on our way home from a Christmas trip to eastern PA. Then the wait began. And the torture continued (remember she had NO idea we were doing this). In fact it intensified – which I didn't think was possible. It finally came to a crescendo less than a week before Christmas as we waited in the van in the parking lot of a nearby mall. (Describe the hissy fit – and then describe how we gave Togo to Emily)

All along we knew we were going to give her the puppy and she had no idea what was in store for her. When he arrived that puppy became an integral part of our home for the next 14 years.

The text that we heard a bit ago from Lamentations talks about God's steadfast love in verse 22. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet is the author of this book of Lamentations and it's just that – a long and sad lament. His song is like the one on Hee Haw that goes (we could probably have a bunch of us who could sing it)

"Gloom, despair, and agony on me

Deep, dark depression, excessive misery,

If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all,

Gloom, despair, and agony on me"

But Jeremiah's lamentations weren't a country comedy show on Saturday night, they were from the grief caused by the people of God who just couldn't walk the straight and narrow and they were suffering the extensive consequences of their persistent disobedience. Jeremiah was hanging on to God's steadfast love – which is derived from a Hebrew word that incorporates a variety of words that include ,love, faithfulness, kindness, loyalty, and strength. It is a word used for covenantal love. The kind of love a couple pledge to one another in marriage. And even though, the people of Israel and Judah had been unfaithful, God would honor his vows and he had a plan that would be good news for ALL people and not just for Jeremiah's errant readers – it was proof that God is faithful to us regardless.

God knew what he was up to even as his people threw a hissy fit.

God so loved the world that he would send his one and only son. To die on the Cross. He loved us that much. So, on this final Sunday of Advent, where the Yordy's lit the Candle of Love we are going to briefly examine this word, "Love" by looking at the other Love Chapter as written by Apostle John. Listen,

Read 1 John 4:7-21

Charles Wesley wrote,

Love divine, all loves excelling,

joy of heav'n to earth come down,

Today, and, better yet, on Christmas Day tomorrow, we again celebrate that love arrived in the form of a baby in Bethlehem – in was just a continuation of the truth that . . .

GOD IS LOVE

- This means more than the concept that God is loving. Instead it means that God's essential nature is love. Leon Morris says, "*He loves, so to speak, not because he finds objects worthy of his love, but because it in his nature to love.*" In other words, his love for us depends not on what we are or who we are, but on what he is. He loves us because he is that kind of God.
- So this is the essential truth, love has its very origin in God. It's not some nice thing that humans can conjure up – it comes from God. So when John Lennon chortled repeatedly, "*All you need is love, all you need is love, all you need is love, love. Love is all you need.*" he was saying that all we need is God. He would have argued that – but he was wrong. God is all we need and when we receive God, we receive love.
- That was the plan. Arguably the most quoted and most well-known in the Bible that I just quoted, says it and now I will again . . .

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

- And the proof is he sent Jesus as the greatest gift. We just established that love is not a human achievement—it comes from God himself, John tells in verse 7 that as we love with the love of God, it shows that we are born of him and that we know him.
- The example we have is what Jesus did on the Cross. We were the guilty ones and he, who was without sin or guilt, took all our penalty. It was, indeed, love divine, all loves excelling. It was the ultimate act of love when God loved the world so much that he sent his son to redeem the world. That means . . .

WE MUST LOVE ONE ANOTHER

- John is really nailing this. That's why it's so appropriate to spend so much time on it this fourth Sunday of Advent. We've heard the words of Longfellow's Christmas song on the past two Sundays, but the words, "*There is no peace on earth, I said; For hate is strong, and mocks the song, of peace on earth, good-will to men!*" are just as true in our war-torn world. And they are a call for us to love one another even more.
- The tense of John's word, *Beloved, let us love one another*, is Brothers, keep on loving one another. What we're talking about here is agape. It's the God kind of love, and it's what Christ followers must have.
- And Jesus taught about it his entire ministry, but the best place we see it is in the Sermon on the Mount where he tells his listeners that must their enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). Edward McDowell says, "*Such love must be exercised by the will and the mind and cannot depend for expression upon emotion or feeling.*" This is because agape love is an action word. It's not a feeling. And Jesus loved us with that kind of love. This is what Paul meant when he said, . . . *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Romans 5:8.
- This kind of love sets Christ Followers apart. McDowell says, "*Love is the distinguishing mark of a child of God, and it is the supreme expression of love that God sent his son into the world, therefore, we are duty bound to love one another.*"
- A good way to prove that we love God is to love the people God loves. I used a story last week about the super positive guy name Michael who, if he "was doing any better, he'd be twins". Remember how the narrator of the story said that "*Michael is the guy you love to hate.*" And, what he meant by that was Michael was so up all the time it was almost tiring. But think about it. Ask yourself, "Who is it I love to hate?" Who are the people in your life who rub you the wrong way? Think about it. Who is it who really make it easy to despise them? Yes. Them. We all have them. Who are they? Here is what John is saying and what every person who says they are a child of God must own, **GOD LOVES THOSE PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT EASY FOR YOU TO HATE THEM.** God loves them. We cannot hate them. If we hate them, we are not of God and we are cutting off our own salvation.
- I'm not making this up. It's right here at the end of our passage, *If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.* 1 John 4:20-21. And we can't use the excuse that John is just talking about Christian brothers and sisters – he is talking about any fellow human being.
- So, here it is, if we say we love God, then there is no room or place for us to hate, because hatred and eternal life are mutually exclusive. Julian Love writes, "*You can't hate others and love God at the same*

time. They are not compatible.” Another commentator says, “If we love God, we will love our fellow human beings. If we don't, then we are liars.” No words are minced here.

- The truth is . . .

GOD’S LOVE IS PERFECTED IN US

- John puts it this way, my paraphrase of vv. 16-17, *Whoever abides in love abides in God. And when we abide in God, his love is perfected in us.* As he drives out the hate and perfects the love, we have confidence on the day of judgement (v. 17). Why is this?
- It’s because perfect love casts out fear. Christ Followers need not fear, because fear and love are incompatible. John tells us that fear has to do with punishment. When we fear it is because we know we deserve punishment. Julian Love writes, *“Without God's love in our lives, we would be forced to cower and fear.”* God's perfect love, living in us and through us, reassures us. We have no fear of punishment. When we're not fearing punishment, we know we are loved, and as we love others, we have no fear.
- God’s love came at Christmas. His perfect son, came so that our love could be perfected in us.

Conclusion: William Barclay writes of this passage, *“We are never nearer to God than when we love.”* And then he quotes Clement of Alexandria who said that the real Christian “Practices being God”. In other words, if you are loving, you are practicing being God. Love comes from God and love leads to God, and as we love we are just like God.

Barclay goes on to that God's love is the explanation of Creation. He says, *“Sometimes we are bound to wonder why God created this world. The disobedience, and the lack of response in men is a continual grief to him. Why should he create a world which was to bring him nothing but trouble? The answer is that Creation was essential to his very nature. If God is love, he cannot exist in lonely isolation. Love must have someone to love and someone to love it.”*

Think about that.

Remember these things on this Christmas Eve morning:

God is love and we must love one another. The love of God and love of our fellow human beings are permanently connected

When love comes, fear goes because love perfects our salvation. Through Jesus, we have love, learn all about love, and pass that love on.

Beloved, let us love one another

For love is of God

And anyone that loveth is born of God

And knoweth God.

He that loveth not

Knoweth not God

For God is love.

Beloved, let us love one another.

First John four verses seven and eight.

Amen.