

“Perfect Love”
1 John 3:13-4:21
Sermon #98
5.2.21
Easter V
60th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic

1 John 3:13-4:21 CEB

3:13 Don't be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

14 We know that we have transferred from death to life, because we love the brothers and sisters. The person who does not love remains in death. **15** Everyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that murderers don't have eternal life residing in them. **16** This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. **17** But if someone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but refuses to help—how can the love of God dwell in a person like that?

18 Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. **19** This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts in God's presence. **20** Even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. **21** Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence in relationship to God. **22** We receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. **23** This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love each other as he commanded us. **24** Those who keep his commandments dwell in God and God dwells in them. This is how we know that he dwells in us, because of the Spirit he has given us.

4:1 Dear friends, don't believe every spirit. Test the spirits to see if they are from God because many false prophets have gone into the world. **2** This is how you know if a spirit comes from God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come as a human is from God, **3** and every spirit that doesn't confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and is now already in the world. **4** You are from God, little children, and you have defeated these people because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. **5** They are from the world. So they speak from the world's point of view and the world listens to them. **6** We are from God. The person who knows God listens to us. Whoever is not from God doesn't listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

7 Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. **8** The person

who doesn't love does not know God, because God is love. **9** This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him. **10** This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins.

11 Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. **12** No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us. **13** This is how we know we remain in him and he remains in us, because he has given us a measure of his Spirit. **14** We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the savior of the world. **15** If any of us confess that Jesus is God's Son, God remains in us and we remain in God. **16** We have known and have believed the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them. **17** This is how love has been perfected in us, so that we can have confidence on the Judgment Day, because we are exactly the same as God is in this world. **18** There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. The person who is afraid has not been made perfect in love. **19** We love because God first loved us. **20** Those who say, "I love God" and hate their brothers or sisters are liars. After all, those who don't love their brothers or sisters whom they have seen can hardly love God whom they have not seen! **21** This commandment we have from him: Those who claim to love God ought to love their brother and sister also.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

One day many years ago, a colleague and friend of mine were talking. We were lamenting the situation we were constantly finding ourselves in and things seemed to only get worse. Later that day, I knew I was about to go into a face-to-face meeting with someone I was encountering some difficulties. Frankly, I was scared. I admitted the truth to my dear friend that I was frightened about going into this meeting. Being fearful, I couldn't grasp anything else in the moment except "fight or flight". I thought I had to have it all figured out on my own. I thought I was going in alone. No backup. No support. No friends.

Eventually, it was time for me to go. My friend and I prayed. And I'll never forget some of the words she prayed. My friend prayed 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear...". Those words hit me between the eyes. And strangely enough, while my troubles didn't go away, my fear did. My fear was replaced with peace. I knew I wasn't going into the heated meeting alone. I knew that I wasn't to rely on my own strength, but in the strength that comes from the LORD. And that strength is perfect love.

Perfect love.

And every time I read or hear 1 John 4:18, I think of my friend who reflected God's perfect love that day. The perfect love that demands so much from us, yet it doesn't cause us to fear! It takes away our fear. Perfect love, rooted in God, remains in us and

drives out the spirit of fear. For when we are anchored in God's perfect love, there is no room for fear.

Fear can look like a lot of things. The Elder in chapters three and four of 1 John continues to hit home with the readers and listeners of this letter that fear can look like the hating of a sibling. Fear also looks like apathy in the midst of heartache when someone is in need as we are told in 1 John 3:17. Yet, if we are living in perfect love, our hearts have no room for fear. In all things, because we are perfectly loved by a perfect God and we keep God's perfect commandment to trust in God's perfect son, Jesus Christ, then the perfect Spirit of Love remains in us.

Fear can weigh us down. Fear can immobilize us. Yet, perfect love drives out fear. Perfect love doesn't seek to harm us. Perfect love doesn't punish us, but it does hold us accountable. When fear

wants to hold us back and tempt us from moving forward into the future, perfect love moves us because God's perfect love is constantly moving. Perfect love that remains in us is not because of our own doing, but because of God's doing because God is love.

The way we as a society normally view love has become so distorted and twisted. Love does not abuse. Love does not hold grudges. It doesn't hate. It doesn't manipulate. Love respects boundaries. Love keeps us accountable when we mess up. Love is not half-way, it is whole.....it is perfect.

Living in constant fear is not love. Yet, plenty of people live in constant fear. When fear threatens, love encourages. When fear immobilizes, love strengthens. When fear creates chaos, love creates peace. When fear brings out our cynicism, love builds trust. Perfect love casts out fear because God is perfect love. And

in perfect love, God sent us the embodiment of perfect love, Jesus Christ.

During April, Jen Miller has been discussing the life of Charles Wesley as well as one of his hymns, “Jesus, Lover of My Soul”, in the PollyPress. Charles and John Wesley were instrumental to the eventual creation of the Methodist Church. We know Charles Wesley for “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” and “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”. The hymn, “Jesus, Lover of My Soul”, which has been the subject of discussion in the PollyPress during April, was written shortly after Charles’ conversion in 1738.

This hymn forces us to look at the dichotomy of the human condition and the nature of Jesus Christ. When the storms rage around us, Wesley reminds us that our refuge is in Christ: “Hide me, O my Savior, hide, till the storm of life is past.”

Yet, in stanza two, Wesley admits the truth that many of us fail to acknowledge: Our help and hope do not rest in any mere power, they rest in Christ. Fear fools us into believing the lie that we alone can control anything that comes at us. Yet, the perfect love Charles Wesley describes at the end of stanza two covers our weaknesses. Perfect love doesn't shame us because we are weak. It constantly molds us into God's image to reflect God's perfect love in the world.

But, how do we live lives that reflect God's perfect love in the world? Jesus is our model. Stanza three of Wesley's hymn sums it up in this way:

Thou, O Christ, art all I want;

more than all in thee I find.

Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,

heal the sick, and lead the blind.

Just and holy is thy name;

I am all unrighteousness.

False and full of sin I am;

thou art full of truth and grace.

Throughout Jesus' life, he kept company with sinners. He kept company with those who were deemed unwanted by society. He healed, he dined, and he held hands with the last and least of these.

That is perfect love. Perfect love heals the sick. Perfect love loves the unloved. Perfect love dines with sinners. Perfect love doesn't hold grudges. Perfect love isn't stagnant, but moves us forward.

Siblings in Christ, may you be overwhelmed with perfect love that only comes from the Creator. May you be overwhelmed with the perfect love that Jesus modeled. May you be overwhelmed with the power of perfect love from the Spirit to continue to work in each of you.

Beloved, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.