

Easter 4B – Love in deed and truth

1. The fourth Sunday of Easter is referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday
 - a. Many of our most beloved readings and images come from this Sunday
 - i. We recite the best known Psalm, Psalm 23, The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want...
 - ii. We hear Jesus say, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”** (Joh 10:11)
 - iii. But no less significantly, though less well-known, in our Epistle from I John we hear, **“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”** (1Jn 3:16)
 - iv. Love, agape, is what marks a Christian’s life, it’s what separates us from the world
 - b. We continue this week with our survey of I John 3
 - i. Last week he focused on our relationship with the Father
 - ii. We learned that we are part of God’s family as John exclaim, **“What marvelous love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God.”** (I Jn 3:1)
 - iii. And that as a member of the family we come to more and more resemble our family in what we value and how we behave.
2. This week John tells us that the defining mark of our relationship with our other family members is love.
 - a. That doesn’t sound all that different from what the world espouses, but this love is different than the love of the world, it’s a love that models Christ.
 - i. John says, **“Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”** (1Jn 3:18)
 - ii. As we have talked about before Biblical Greek has three words for love, whereas English has only one.
 - iii. The word used of Christ’s love for us is “agape,” which doesn’t signify an emotional state but action – it is sometimes translated “charity”
 - iv. And it is that kind of love in action between Christians that marks the family of God and separates us from the world.
 - b. In this section John is drawing a sharp distinction between how we treat each other in the family of God and how the “family” of the world operates.
 - i. For the world talk is cheap, we can say “I love you” but that rarely translates into meaningful action let alone sacrifice to help someone
 - ii. The world and its children are not marked by real love but hate as John says was exemplified by Cain, **We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.** (1Jn 3:12)

- iii. Cain and Abel were the first two children born to Adam and Eve, the first human children
 - iv. And though they were brothers Cain struck Abel down becoming the first murderer in history, and we've been killing each other since.
 - c. Because the world is marked by hate it can't abide anything that isn't like it as John tells us, "**Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.**" (1Jn 3:13)
 - i. We see evidence of that all around us today, hate and intolerance masquerading as love and concern.
 - ii. The growing influence of cancel culture that portrays itself as virtuous and loving, seeking to right historic wrongs that doesn't allow for repentance, forgiveness, or redemption.
 - iii. So-called "Critical theory" that divides our society into groups that are purported to think and act homogenously rather than as individuals, pigeonholing us based on race, gender, or some other inherent trait rather than individual merit.
 - d. And now as our world rapidly transitions to post-Christianity their animosity turns toward us.
 - i. A 2018 Pew Research poll showed that among those who identified as liberals (I don't know what criteria was used) only 33 percent believe that churches and religious organizations contribute to society in a positive manner, a drop from 49 percent in 2010, and overall, 20% of Americans feel religions and religious institutions do more harm than good.
 - ii. The world talks about love and tolerance but it is marked by division, hatred, and distrust.
- 3. How does Christian love distinguish itself from worldly love? How do we love in deed and in truth? It's based on what Christ has done for us.
 - a. He laid down his life for us and we should lay down our lives for the brothers, but what does that look like in the real world?
 - i. None of us have been called upon to martyr ourselves for the church or another person, how do we lay our lives down?
 - ii. John gives us a very practical example, "**But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?**" (1Jn 3:17)
 - iii. James says something similar in his epistle, "**If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?"** (Jas 2:15-16)

- iv. That is loving in word only, not in deed and in truth, you've done nothing to alleviate their suffering or need beyond wishing them well. How often does that describe our love?
- b. Sacrificial love, charity, was the kind of love that marked the early Christian church
 - i. It's what led to its rapid growth – how we care for one another in the body.
 - ii. The book of Acts reports, **“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,”** (Act 2:44-46)
 - iii. This was not a weekly get together for an hour, they were worshipping and eating together day by day in each other's homes (not the fellowship hall) – they knew one another intimately, they were a family in the truest sense.
 - iv. What would our church look like if we lived more like the early church, how would our relationships be different?
- c. The world does not love like that, the world's wisdom says take care of yourself first and then you'll be able to take care of others
 - i. But Christian love says love others as Christ loved you.
 - ii. He became one with us in our need when He was born of Mary; He spent time with His disciples, a pattern that was modelled in the early church.
 - iii. In short Christ loved sacrificially in deed and in truth and He calls us to love one another in deed and truth as John concludes, **“And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.”** (1Jn 3:23)
- d. Dearly beloved in the Lord, let us come together in fervent prayer that we might be led by the Spirit to model that kind of love here and now
 - i. That we come to know and love one another not through a second hand report of a pastoral visitation or prayer request but because we *KNOW* and love one another.
 - ii. Let us follow God's will for our lives in Christ that we love not as the world loves in word and talk, but in deed and in truth!