

From Death to Life I John 3:11-24 S 8

We won't be able to get through First John this year before Advent. So we have a two part sermon and then Eternity Sunday. Let's begin with **verse 11**. "For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another." Simple and clear isn't it? Especially if we've had parents who took us to Sunday School and church. We've heard this Gospel message most of our lives. We know this is the beginning of true love for us who are in Christ. This is how we have come to know what real love is. It is unconditional and at times uncomfortable love.

A young man finds the woman of his dreams and asks her to marry him. He tells his mother he wants her to meet his fiancé, but he wants to make a bit of a game out of it. He says he'll bring the lady over with two other women and see if his mother can guess which is the one he wants to marry. His mother agrees to the game.

So he shows up at his mother's house with three beautiful young ladies. They all sit down on the couch and have a wonderful evening getting to know each other. At the end of the evening, the young man asks his mother, "OK, Mom, which one is the woman I want to marry?"

Without any hesitation at all, his mother replies, "The one in the middle."

The young man is astounded. "How in the world did you figure it out?"

"Easy," his mother says. "I don't like her."

Whether we like someone or not, we are supposed to love them. We may not like someone, but we have to love them anyway. If someone is sweet, has a good personality, and is nice to us, it sure makes them a lot

easier to love. So why must we love others even if we don't like them? Well, what do you think God does with us? I am pretty sure there are things we do and think and maybe even some character traits that He doesn't like, but God still loves each of us!

The love we are talking about refers to divine love, self-sacrificial love. This love is produced in the heart of the yielded saint by the Holy Spirit. The infection of bad doctrine was robbing the original recipients of this letter, those Christians, of this love. They were going adrift from their love relationship with Jesus Christ that provided them with the empowering to live in & live out God's love.

So to drive his point home, John offers a contrast between what is not love and what is love. **Verse 12**. "Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother Abel's, were righteous."

Satan is out to devour and destroy us any way he can. He is a murderer & he is behind all murders. Make no mistake about it; he is not the figment of someone's imagination. He is not some imaginary person like an evil supervillain – Doctor Doom or Lex Luther. Satan is real and evil and is behind all evil in the world. It's hard sometimes to not be surprised by the evil one's work in this world.

Theodore Roosevelt years ago said, and its applicable for today: "The times are evil; that is, there is much evil in them. It would be to our shame and discredit if we failed to recognize that evil; if we wrapped ourselves in a foolish optimism and failed to war with heart and strength against the evil. It would be equally to our discredit if we declined to strive for good because we feared the strength of evil." We must strive for the good, love the sinner, resist and hate the sin.

And Romans 12:9 instructs us, “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.” We should hate what is evil. We should be abhorred by evil. We should loathe evil and not flirt with it.

A foreigner living in Papua New Guinea, years ago, came upon a native reading the Bible. The foreigner said, “That book is out of date in my country.” The native replied, “If it had been out of date here, you would have been eaten a long time ago.”

The Word of God is never out of date for everyone! The Word of God is what gives us the message of salvation that Jesus saves! The Word of God teaches us how to live rightly and righteously in this world. God’s Word has said from the beginning that we must love people and loathe evil.

Next, **verse 13** announces, “Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.” People who are morally upright and live in the light of God’s love expose the evil of this world. The unrighteous then become painfully aware that their deeds and life and beliefs are unacceptable. Some get downright uncomfortable or offensive if they know we are followers of Jesus. But many will not come to Jesus and repent and be changed. Instead they try to bring down those living in righteousness.

Don’t be shocked or worried if the world despises you because your life makes them painfully aware of their immoral way of living. They hate what is good instead of fleeing from evil. Satan controls people through various ways, causing them to self destruct as well as to harm others. How horrible to live on the same level as Satan, walking in darkness instead of light.

Verse 14 gives us a way to test the reality of our Christianity. “We know that we have

passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He, who does not love, abides in death.” Love means life. Refusal to love means death. The world is full of devilish hate. Many think and do what pleases them, but we are different. What makes us different is the “certain knowledge that we have left the culture of death” for the sphere of life.

The phrase, “we have passed from death to life,” in the Greek perfect tense indicates a permanent abiding result because of a past action. When we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior we have passed into a new way of living where we abide, hang out.

The definitive sign, the proof, that we have made this eternal passage, from death into life, is “love for each other.” Our natural state is selfishness. To love others is the proof that the natural, the old state, has been abandoned. If we have the state or position of life, of light, of being God’s children, we will have the activity & disposition of love.

We love others by doing good to and for them. God wants us to love others just because they are human, they are His creation: the good, the bad, the ugly, the young, the old, and people of all races and religions. As hard as it may be, we must work at loving others, because this is God’s message. This is His will. This is His way.

This type of love is a key contrast between followers of Jesus and non-believers. It’s the heart and substance of the Christian’s basic and indispensable duty. There is no excuse, equivocation, exception or rational. This statement and command originates in God’s character that we learn about from the Bible and from Jesus. It’s foundational. If love is not present, then we remain in our original state and condition, which is death. Those who do not love as Jesus loves are still within the realm of the death culture.

I've had a theory that one reason the world is in trouble, is we use other words to talk about evil. I invite you to listen to how people talk when a tragedy occurs, like the shooting in Southerland Springs, Texas, last Sunday. With every shooting, it's the same analysis.

Also, when something bad occurs, we get into conflict with each other about the cause, and can't move toward a solution. The gun control people are right. The mental health people are right. The domestic violence people are right. The family systems and parenting people are right. All these perspectives are right in their analysis. But no change occurs. Society is stuck. And evil, murder, flourishes. As many of you know, I'm no fan of Donald Trump. But he was right to call this shooting and the one in Los Vegas evil. Something has happened to us that is the work of the devil. He gets us fighting about causes, instead of fighting together to solve problems. And we need to understand what's occurring, but we also need to name evil, against God's will. Without any moral standards, we are just stuck with our knowledge.

A related example. I'm all for mental health and the continual new knowledge about how our bodies and minds function, along with sociology. But I don't think it's an accident that as the books of medical & psychological diagnoses get thicker and thicker – society gets sicker and sicker. We keep getting better at diagnosing, with all kinds of labels to help us understand, but we find it harder and harder to help people heal – because the medical labels keep us from labeling evil as evil. We ignore the spiritual components.

This analysis may not make sense – but I just have a gut feeling that we get into further trouble when we don't label, evil as the devil's work, & then work toward solutions.

Verse 15 testifies that hatred of another follower of Jesus is the moral equivalent of murder. "Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." John just doesn't let up does he? He says it like it is - murderous hatred is an indication that one does not belong to God's family.

This isn't just about the act of murder. John is echoing Jesus' words from Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount, that whoever hates another person is a murderer at heart. Christianity begins in the heart, mind and soul. Outward compliance alone is not sufficient.

A visitor at the zoo was chatting with the keeper of the lion house. "I have a cat at home," said the visitor, "and your lions act just like my cat. Look at them sleeping so peacefully! It seems a shame to put those beautiful creatures behind bars."

The keeper laughed, "These may look like your cat, but their disposition is radically different. There's murder in their hearts. You'd better be glad the bars are there."

The only reason some people have never actually murdered anyone is because of the "bars" that have been put up: arrest and the penalties of the law, fear of what will people think & the possibility of death or retribution. The question of guilt is not so much what did we do, but what did we want to do.

Anger, bitterness, jealousy, frustration, hurt, greed, and so on, because of another person, and / or from our own emotions, without self control, is like an evil cancer within us that can destroy us. Don't let a bitter root grow in you or God's church. I've said to more than one person in a church fight, "You might win the battle but lose the war." I'll let your imaginations work out the variety of implications of this statement.

Hebrews 12, teaches us, (14-15) “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defiles many.”

Hatred that is continually nurtured yields bitter fruit and not the Fruits of the Holy Spirit. And it usually doesn't just affect those direct involved. It pollutes many.

One of the worst cases of hatred I know is found in a will written in 1935 by a Mr. Donahue. It said, "Unto my two daughters, by reason of their unfilial attitude toward a doting father. (Unfilial means not suitable for a son or daughter; violating the customary obligation of a child to a parent.) I leave the sum of \$1.00 to each & a father's curse. May their lives be fraught with misery, unhappiness, and poignant sorrow. May their deaths be soon and of a lingering malignant and torturous nature." The last line of the will reads, "May their souls rest in hell and suffer the torments of the condemned for eternity."

Such utter contempt and meanness didn't develop in a day. It had to grow over a long period of time. We should never allow our minds to become fertile soil for the seeds of hatred. We would do ourselves a world of good by heeding Ephesians 4:26. “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” And James gives wise counsel when he tells us to "be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (1:19-20).

Let's not forget that the Bible teaches, "who ever hates another person is a murderer." How important it is, therefore, never to nurture hatred's bitter fruit! This is God's message to human kind from the beginning. Next week we look at the rest of the contrast the Apostle John teaches us.