

The Second Sunday after Trinity

1 John 3:13-18: "We Abide Together in Jesus' Love."

June 20/21, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

### In Nomine Iesu

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Almighty God our heavenly Father, who gave Your Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins, and has commanded us to love one another as You have loved us: Make us, we beseech You, so mindful of the needs and sufferings of others, that we may ever be ready to show them compassion, and according to our ability to relieve their wants; for the sake of the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 108)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for today is taken from the third chapter of St. John's First Epistle. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. / By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 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? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who lived a perfect life of love on our behalf, and who continues to inspire and work that love among us, dear fellow redeemed:

The home should be a place of love, kindness, and joy, but it isn't always so. The people who make up a family are sinners, and sinners like to have things their way. You may remember thinking that you "just can't live" with that annoying sibling anymore or with those unfair parents. You may have even said to one of them those three terrible, powerful words, "I hate you!" You probably regretted saying that later on and were glad to hear the even more powerful words, "I forgive you! I love you!"

Hatred has no place in the Christian home or in the Christian congregation. Hatred is the aim of the devil. He is eager to incite division, conflict, violence, abuse, and self-centeredness. We see these things raging all around us. God calls His people to do the opposite of these things. He calls us to be "kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another" (*Eph. 4:32*). The Letter to the Galatians outlines "the fruit of the Spirit" in the life of the Christian, the fruit of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (*5:22-23*).

But our lives as Christians don't always look so fruitful. Just like the unbelievers of the world, we Christians are guilty of sinful stubbornness, hatred, and selfishness. In the broader Christian church, the world is right to point an accusing finger at us. Look at the rampant abuse of power

and trust by ministers who are supposed to serve with love and humility. Look at all the congregations that are torn apart by petty disputes among its members. Unbelievers see these things and walk the other way.

But let's bring it closer to home. Is there anything that visitors might see or hear among us to make them question if we really believe what we say we do? Would they detect that we accept people who are like us while looking down on those who are not? Would they hear us speak harshly or engage in gossip about others? Would they get a warm welcome or a cold shoulder? Would they find humility among us or pride? Cooperation or division?

I suppose they would find a mixture of all these things. We are not perfect. We are just as sinful as any who might walk through those doors. But we must never become comfortable in that sin. Instead of tucking our sin away, trying to cover it up, we expose it to the light of God's Word. That is no easy thing. It is not fun to have our sins uncovered. It is easy enough to shine the light on the sins of other people. But when that light shines on us, we want to hide our wrongs.

The apostle John writes, *"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."* When we hear "brother," we think "male sibling." But here the term is not used for our biological family. It is used for our spiritual family. We are all "brothers," because we are *"all sons of God, through faith"* as the Bible says (Gal. 3:26). Through faith, we join Jesus in His position as the Father's only Son, which means that all the honor and glory the Father bestows on His exalted Son is also given to us.

In this way, every believer in Jesus is totally equal: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 3:28). We are equally redeemed by God, equally forgiven, equally treasured. Since He loves us this way without distinctions, this is how we should love one another. By our willing and cheerful love toward each other, we show that *"we have passed out of death into life."* We are not lost in the devil's darkness. We are not consumed by hatred. We love as God has loved us.

When one Christian does not love another Christian, this is not justifiable in God's sight. That does not stop us from trying to justify it. Like the guests in the Holy Gospel for today who had all kinds of excuses why they couldn't attend the master's banquet (Luk. 14:16-24), we make excuses for why we don't have to love our brothers in Christ. Our lack of love sounds like this:

- "How could I possibly love her after what she did to me?"
- "I won't apologize to him unless he apologizes to me first!"
- "She always has to get her way!"
- "He doesn't care about anyone but himself."
- "Things would be a lot better around here if they were gone."
- "I'm not sorry for them – they got what they deserved!"
- "We've always done it this way, and if they don't like it, they can leave!"
- "If they don't go along with what I think, then I'll just stop coming!"

These are not statements of love. They are statements of selfishness and pride. If those sins are not exposed to the light, it is only a short step to anger, resentment, and hatred. In God's view,

hatred is murder, and *"no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."* So there must be repentance – a heartfelt recognition of your own failings, a real sorrow over sin. It is easier to see the sins in others, but God's Law uncovers the sins in your own heart. You are no better than they are, and you may even be worse.

The only one who is justified in holding sins against others is God. He has done wrong to no one. He is perfect. He has the right to condemn us to eternal punishment in hell for breaking His holy Law. But God does not rain His terrors upon us and smash us with the hammer of His justice. He loves us. *"God is love" (1Jo. 4:16)*. God loved the world in this way, *"that he gave his only Son" (Joh. 3:16)*. He gave His only Son to be our ultimate brother.

If God has given you a brother in your family, what are the qualities you like about him? Is he a good listener? Does he often have your back? Is he thoughtful? Funny? Is he someone you can always count on? But along with all the good qualities, I'm sure there are things you do not like about your brother. Maybe he is too stubborn, or he is not assertive enough. Maybe he makes some boneheaded decisions. Maybe he let you down when you were really counting on him.

Jesus is the ultimate brother. He has never failed you, never been too busy for you. You've never had to wonder whether He had your best interests in mind. But He has done more than *"be there for you."* Every time you disobeyed God's commands and sinned against Him, Jesus took the fall for you. When the Law like a strict classroom teacher asks, *"Who did that? Tell me right now or everyone gets punished!"* Jesus raised His hand and said, *"I did."*

When you spoke harshly about someone or spread gossip to harm their reputation, Jesus said, *"It was Me."* When you became angry and wished harm on another, Jesus said, *"I did that."* When you made excuses for why someone in need was not worthy of love, Jesus said, *"Put the blame on Me."* When you did not get what you wanted, and you hardened your heart against those God has given you to love, Jesus said, *"I'm the guilty one. Take it out on Me."*

And God did. God took out all His righteous anger against sin on His Son. That is why the Lord came down from heaven to be our brother in the flesh. Jesus came to suffer and die for all the wrongs we had done, as though He were the one who did them. He let Himself be condemned and despised in everyone's place, so He could save all. Because of His sacrifice, we are no longer destined for eternal punishment but for eternal life. That is love! *"By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us."*

Since He has redeemed us from our hatred and our failure to love, we are now free to love in His name. We are part of His holy body by faith. Our life is hidden in His. So we don't have to find the motivation and the strength for love inside ourselves. The gap may be too wide between us and another brother. We don't know how we could possibly bring ourselves to reconcile. But where love is lacking in us, it is not lacking in our Savior.

We find love for others in His love for us and for them. He has died for each of our sins. Jesus has removed the division between us and the Father, and He wants to remove the divisions between us and our brothers. This requires humility and repentance and sacrifice, not just on the part of those opposed to us, but on our part. The Holy Spirit works these things in us through His Word.

He shows us how little we deserve from God, but how incredibly much He has given. He guides us to bring our frustrations and grievances before our dear Father's throne. He brings us healing and peace through Him who sacrificed everything for us out of love. As Jesus *"laid down His life for us,"* the Holy Spirit now leads us to *"lay down our lives for the brothers."* He leads us to share the abundant goods we have been given with a *"brother in need."* He leads us to love not only *"in word or talk but in deed and in truth."*

We are not bound together with our brothers by our own love. Our love for each other comes from Jesus. Through His holy Word and Sacraments, He fills us again and again with His love, so we have ample love to share with one another. *"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity" (Psa. 133:1),* when **We Abide Together in Jesus' Love.**

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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