

Reflection “Embodied Love”

Genesis 18:1-8

1 John 4:7-21

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Our New Testament Lesson is from 1 John 4:7-21. Listen now to the word of God.

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. ¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

¹⁴And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. ¹⁵God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

¹⁷Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their siblings, are liars; for those who do not love a sibling whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. ²¹The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their siblings also.

This is the word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

The Lord be with you.

The agape meal, or love feast, was brought to the Americas by the Moravians and reflects the meals shared in the early church. In the early days of the United States, the agape meal was shared by congregations when there was no pastor available to preside over communion. It was a service led by the people of the church.

With that in mind, my message will be short, so that around tables - and on zoom - we can share - and learn and lead together - what this morning's scriptures might be saying to us - to me - to you.

The word love is used 27 times in this passage. That's 9% of all the words. The single word love, in English, has many meanings. In Greek, there are four words used for love in the bible.

Eros - is romantic love

Philia - like philadelphia, the city of brotherly love - is the love among friends

Storge - is family love - like that between a parent and a child.

And finally, agape - unconditional love - the love that God has for each of us - love that is freely given and, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is an overflowing love, a spontaneous love, which seeks nothing in return.

This love, agape, is the love used throughout this passage.

John tells us 3 things about agape:

1. We love because God first loved us - from the moment of creation, God loves us and created us in God's image. It is why we practice infant baptism - to remind us that even before we understand love, God loves us and seals us as God's children.
2. God's love is revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ - love incarnate, love in flesh, love that was born, lived, suffered, and died.
 - a. In the words of John, God's love was sent
 - i. that we might live through him
 - ii. To be the atoning sacrifice for our sins

iii. As the Savior of the world

God loved us so much, as human bodies on earth, that God became one of us - was born, grew and experienced human life, witnessed and experienced human suffering. Jesus showed up, in body, among those who were marginalized, those who were ostracized, those who were cast out - those who were regarded as worthless. Jesus showed up for those who were in need of healing, of love, of being seen. Jesus showed up, with his body, for those who long to know God's love and to teach us how to be God's love to others.

God loves us so much that in conquering sin and death, we are reminded that when we don't get it right, God loves us anyway and turns us time and again back to God.

God loves us so much that Jesus came as the savior of the world, to embody God's love for all.

Which moves us to John's third agape claim, which reminds us of Jesus commandment to us

3. Those who love God must love others. We can't say we love God and not love God's children.

In our Genesis passage, love showed up in the flesh for Abraham and Sarah - and Abraham showed up in flesh for the strangers who visited them, with great hospitality.

Loved showed up this past Thursday evening in a sanctuary filled with Christian, Muslim, and Jewish siblings for the Interfaith Gathering of Solidarity and Hope.

What is remarkable to me about the interfaith service is not just that Christians showed up in a safe Christian space to show our support of our Muslim and Jewish siblings but that our Muslim and Jewish siblings showed up in a Christian space and that they showed up together amongst people who could be choosing sides, and not knowing who was on one side or the other. They showed up because of our

shared belief that we are commanded to love God and to love one another. They showed up because there is no fear in love. They showed up because they trust in the love of our common God. They showed up because time has been spent building relationships that are bound together in working against hatred and working toward peace and hope.

If I am being honest, I felt a bit called out - admonished in love during this service. Why? Because in the immediate aftermath of the Oct 7 Hamas attack on Israel, as many of us formed opinions about which side is right and wrong, and paralyzed for fear of not knowing what to say or how to say it or who to say it to, the Imam and Rabbi sat down for tea and cookies and conversation. They tore down the walls of “othering” to sit in one another’s pain and offer comfort. They chose love over fear and hatred, even in the midst of the great pain that each of them and their communities are suffering. I did nothing but watch the news and weep for the loss of innocent life - and have opinions of my own. I did not reach out to the local mosque and synagogue in love.

Remembering Christ’s atoning sacrifice and call to repent and do better, I showed up on Thursday. I talked to the Imam and Rabbis. I talked to the people who were gathered, and I made a commitment to them, and to God, to reach out and be present with them.

For those who gathered on Thursday night, agape was there in the gathering of bodies showing up for one another. God’s unconditional love poured out and in so doing offered peace and hope to our siblings who are being attacked by hatred and bigotry, even in our community. Many of you have written letters to the Islamic Center and Synagogues. That is a way of embodying love.

Agape love has a cost - it cost Jesus his body, and it costs our bodies and our time if we are willing to truly live out this love. It matters that we, as people of privilege in many ways, show up with and for those who are marginalized, who are the targets of hate in any form.

To love our neighbor is to show up - with our bodies, to be a physical presence to those who are marginalized. God came to be a physical presence in the world, and it was dangerous. Why? Because God loves us. We don’t love our neighbors to gain

God's love, we love our neighbors because God's love fills us first - because the love God has for us is greater than we can imagine and is poured out, even from us. It is why we show up at Advent house and the Pride festival, it is why we give gifts through the St Vincent giving tree and support the alternative gift market.

We cannot, we do not, love God if we do not love our siblings. We cannot, we do not, love God if we let fear be our guide. We cannot, we do not, love God, if we fail to acknowledge the humanity of another. We cannot, we do not, love God if we allow another to be the target of hatred and bigotry. We cannot, we do not, love God if we have enough to eat while our neighbor is hungry. We cannot, we do not, love God if we do not put our bodies on the line for justice, peace, and hope.

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Love that is unconditional, embodied, and commanded of us through Jesus.

Let us pray:

Holy One, fill us with your love and compel us to show up as the embodiment of your love. Thank you for loving us and for showing us the way of love. Amen.