

1 John 3:11 – 4:21 Sermon, 5.9.2021 – God is love

I don't know if you've been watching the Paralympics or not. Great stories of courage. Well here's another lovely story from a few years ago.

8-year-old Noah Aldrich: his little brother Lucas is disabled, he spends his life in a wheelchair. Can't talk, can't run, can't walk. But when big brother Noah signed up for a kids' triathlon, he thought he'd take his little brother with him. So Noah and his mum and dad make Luke a special cart that Noah can push in the one mile run, that he can drag behind him in the 200 metre bike ride; and an inflatable boat so he can drag Luke along in the swim.

Brotherly love. They trained together for months. In the end, Noah pushed him, and pulled him, and dragged him through water in a time of just over 54 minutes. They didn't win the race. But the funny thing is, nobody was all that interested in the kid who won the race. Everyone was talking about Noah and Luke. And the story of brotherly love.

Today we're focusing on love, God's love. How do we know what love looks like? This is John's question this morning as we look at this section today.

We pick up from v.11 where we left off last week. Very simply as God's people we are to love one another. This is the message we've heard from the beginning. And then we get the story of brotherly love, or rather brotherly hate. Why do we love that story of Noah and Luke – because often what we see in our world is a world that's messed up. A world where family disfunction is actually the norm.

And here it is right there in the first recorded family in the book of Genesis; Genesis chapter 4. After the fall, after the first parents take things into their own hands and say we'll decide good and evil for ourselves... you meet Cain and Abel. And here is the story of Cain murdering Abel because he was righteous.

Why does John include this particular story here? Well, here was a man, Cain, who was an example of a person who in a sense joined forces with Satan in practising sin. He had no desire to change but as The Message translates it, "He was deep in the practice of evil." We revolt at the actions of Cain don't we? That was terrible what he did – he killed his own brother, because of his jealousy of his brother. His brother was a righteous man, God accepted his sacrifice. Cain was unrepentant, rebellious, lawless - he didn't learn from his brother's actions. He should've come to God repentant. And so this story of Cain is the bridge between the horror of being controlled by sin in v.4-10 to the freedom and joy of those who are controlled by the Spirit, who have God's seed, God's life, deep within them in v.9 of chapter 3. There is also the thought that this is a bit like Jesus' situation. In a

very real way the Jewish authorities had been envious of Jesus, his goodness, his righteousness to the point that they demanded his death. And so John reminds his brothers and sisters, in v.13, 'Don't be surprised if the world hates you.' Cain hated Abel, the Jewish authorities hated Jesus, the world will hate you. But what is our response? We love.

In v.14,15 - love will be a mark that we are God's children, that we have passed from death to life. It's a reminder to examine ourselves – we don't want to act as those who remain in death, hating others, like Cain. In these verses we can hear John echoing the words of Jesus from Matthew 5 – "You have heard it said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." It is the total opposite of the response of Cain. This is the response of God's children.

And so in v.16 - 18 – what is love like? Jesus has shown us as he laid down his life for us. And this is how we should act. Love is not just words, but is shown primarily through actions, like Jesus on the cross. Let us share our material possessions with our brothers and sisters as another way of practically showing love.

I'm including some links this week to the story of Helen Roseveare. A woman who loved deeply and served people tirelessly in her job as a doctor. Even after being raped she forgave the men and continued to love those around her. Have a look at her story this week as an example of love in action.

Ok, we come to v.19-24 – Not sure exactly what this means but I think what John is saying is that whether our hearts convict us of sin or not our hearts can be at rest. It ties in with what he is going to say later in chapter 4:18 that there is no fear in love. As God's children we are not children who fear, but we are children whose hearts are at rest in his presence. So if my heart condemns me for my actions, I can rest because God is greater than my heart, he knows everything about me – I can rest in him as my Father. It does not mean that I just ignore my wrong actions but I don't have to fear at all that I will be rejected by my Father. And if my heart does not condemn me I can rest in his presence with the added reminder that our Father delights to give to us as we go to him in prayer. It might seem like v.22 says we can ask for anything and we'll get it – and that's right. But I'm sure John has in mind the words of Jesus in John 15:7 – "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." Very similar isn't it? The key is we REMAIN in Jesus and the other? His words REMAIN in us. As we walk close to him, listening to him, talking with him, open to him teaching us in our daily life and from his word we will begin to ask things of Jesus with his mind. So to conclude this little section, Whether our hearts condemn or not condemn us our hearts can be at rest and we can know that we belong to the truth because we believe in Jesus and we love one another. And we know it because his Spirit lives in us in v.24. And v.23 reminds us, again, that 2 key marks of the Christian are 1.

That we believe in the name of Jesus, God's Son and 2. We love one another as he commanded us.

Chapter 4:1 – 6 seem like a bit of an aside but they fit in with the overall theme of how do I know what is the truth.

v.1 - Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. NLT

The key distinguishing feature is that the Spirit acknowledges that Jesus is from God, has come in the flesh, is human and divine. This is a reminder that their understanding of who Jesus is must be spot on and central.

And v.4 – 6 are, again, reassuring words. You are from God, the Spirit in you (ie the Holy Spirit) is far stronger than anything in the world. These false teachers are of the world; they speak the world's language. John and the other teachers/apostles with him are from God (Remember he told us in the opening verses of his letter that he was with Jesus.) Those who know God will listen to John.

Ok, v.7 – 12 – Now back to the main topic. Let us love because love comes from God. We show that we know God by loving, because God is love. And. Again, God has shown us his love by sending his Son into the world that we might love him. You want to know what love is – it's not us loving God; it's God sending his Son as an atoning, a complete, sacrifice for our sins. Since God loved us we should love one another. No one has seen God but if we love it's like people seeing God's love. God lives in us. What a statement – his love is made complete in us in v.12. John is building up to his big statement in v.17. We could spend a whole sermon on these five verses alone.

But the key thought is it is God who shows us what true love is, and this especially through Jesus. We need to get back to Matthew's gospel don't we?

Ok, we're almost there. v.13 – 16 - Another word of assurance – how you will know that you live in Christ and he lives in us? – we have his Spirit. And we testify that Jesus was sent into the world to be the Saviour of the World. If you acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in you. And then almost a little addendum – in v.16 - we know this love from God and we rely on it, or as The Message translates v.15 &16, "Everyone (that's us) who confesses that Jesus is God's son participates continuously in an intimate relationship with God. We know it so well. We've embraced it heart and soul, this love that comes from God." Let's embrace it heart and soul.

v.17 – 18 - The big statement – "GOD IS LOVE. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." When we live in love we live in God and God lives in us. It's the Trinity relationship we talked about from John 17. Love is made complete in us and as a result we will have confidence to face the day of judgement. In this world we are like Jesus.

Now I want to say a couple of things here. We sometimes hear the statement God is love turned around and so it says, Love is God. Now there is a big difference here. Because if you turn it around you've made the supreme concept love and you've made God less than that. And you've also said that other things aren't God. So justice and mercy and righteousness and holiness, they don't count compared to love. So love becomes the sole judge of anything. So free love, it's ok, they love one another – so love becomes the thing that is most important in any discussion. Whereas John would want to say, "No the most important thing in the discussion is God, not love." Because God has other ways in which he wants to act and other things that he wants to say, not just love. Having said that, we can see clearly in this letter that if we truly want to know what love is like, look at God. At the heart of his being is love. It's a self-giving, self-denying, total commitment to others thing.

And then v.18. This is a very powerful verse for each of us today. We have no fear, now. Not just in the future, but now. *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.* For those of us who are in Christ, who live in God, sin has been dealt with; there is no place for fear. We're in a perfect relationship with God – why would we fear now? Is God going to withdraw his love from us for any reason? No. But I know and you know how easy it is to continue to live in fear. Do you live in fear that you have not really been good enough? Do I live in fear that I haven't done a good enough job at the church? There's all kinds of fears that we have – fear that we've not been a good enough parent to these children God has entrusted to me; the fear that I'm not a good enough neighbour; not a good enough citizen in my community; fear that I'm not using my God-given gifts; fear that I'm not fulfilling my role in life; lots of fears; fears that we're not being the person God wants us to be. To which the answer is You're going to be the person God wants you to be. Remember 2 weeks ago chapter 3; 2 – when Christ appears we shall be like him. This isn't dependent on how good we are now – this is a promise of God. And it's based on what he did on the cross for us and our trust in that. But don't worry. It's ok. We're on our way on the journey. God is shaping us, changing us. It's his work; yes he's called us to be a part of it, but he's in charge. I am convinced that the more we know God's love the less we have to fear. That's why Paul prays for the Ephesians that they would know how wide and long and high God's love is; that they would know God's love more and more. Remember what Janet told us about Romans 8 – who can separate me from God's love? Nothing.

19 – 21 – Now the summary – We love because he first loved us. You don't practice hating if you're God's child. If you do hate you cannot love God. If you love God love your brother and sister. And this is his command to us.

So as we summarise this passage I think there are two key themes that emerge. Remember, John is writing to encourage the believers in this church or group of churches.

So No.1 Love others, love. Love one another. How do we know what love is? Love is from God; it's an action that we've witnessed in Jesus, especially in his death on the cross for us. So keep your eyes on Jesus; follow him; love like him.

Is there someone in your life where there is a blockage, you're not talking to them. How can you love them? By praying for them? By taking the first step and picking up the phone and talking to them? By asking their forgiveness?

Is there someone God's put on your heart? Someone who needs a word of encouragement? A reminder that they are loved by God? Some practical help? Maybe all you can do is pray for them?

No.2 Believe in Jesus, the Son of God, the one who was fully human and fully God. John keeps coming back again and again to these 2 basic truths doesn't he?

It's interesting you know. I've been studying at Christ College for almost a year and a half now. I'm learning lots. But I'm very conscious that I can have lots of knowledge of God, of Jesus, of the Spirit. I can know all the right doctrines and have that all sewn up, which I don't by the way. But I keep coming back to a key thing which I think John is also saying to us. We're made for relationship, with God and with others. The key thing for us is that we want to know Jesus. We want to know God and to love like God Paul says in Philippians 3:10 -

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. I want to know Christ. As I study at College, all that I learn is so that I might know Jesus. As we read the Bible, all that we read is that we might know Jesus, might walk with him through the day. Moment by moment. As we meet with our brothers and sisters at Home Group or to pray together or whatever, we want to know Jesus. And as we get to know Jesus better, we will love better.

PRAY: