



Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 2, 2021

* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude: "The King of Love My Shepherd Is"

arr: David Lasky

Gathering

Welcome and Announcements

Lighting the Christ Candle

Acolyte: Jesus Christ is alive and among us now. Even as the light pushes back the dark, so to Jesus Christ has defeated death. Let us worship God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

* Call to Worship

Liturgist: From you, O Lord, comes the theme of my praise among your people.

All: The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord will praise him – may your hearts live forever!

Liturgist: All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord;
And all the families of the nations will bow down before him,

All: for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

Psalm 22:26-28 adapted

All Singing: 575 "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

God's Greeting

God's People Greeting One Another

Reconciliation

Liturgist: All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him – those who cannot keep themselves alive.

All: Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.

Liturgist: They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn:
The Lord has done it! *Psalm 22:29-31 adapted*

All: Lord, in light of that great mercy, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

Liturgist: We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength.
We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves.

All: In your mercy forgive what we have been, help us amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways,

Liturgist: to the glory of your holy name. Through Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Silent Confession and Reflection

Liturgist: This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God. *I John 4:10-12, The Message*

* **All Singing: 674 “As Moses Raised the Serpent Up”**

Liturgist: John 15: 12-17

Proclamation

Prayer for Illumination

All Singing: “Teach Us Your Ways”
Soloist singing first verse, all singing verses 2, 3, and 4

**Teach us your ways, teach us your ways as we learn from one another,
learn to love each other, teach us your ways.**

**Teach us to give, teach us to give, give ourselves for one another,
learn to love each other, teach us to give.**

**Teach us to weep, teach us to weep; let us weep for one another,
learn to love each other, teach us to weep.**

**Hallelujah, hallelujah; let us learn from one another,
learn to love each other, teach us your ways.**

Scripture: I John 4:7-21

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon: Making Manifest

* Minster / All: **259** “Affirmation: The Unity of the Body”
From the Belhar Confession

* All Singing: **258** “Koinonia”

Dedication

A Word of Blessing

Prayers of the People

* All Singing: **927** “God, the Father of Your People”

Benediction

Postlude: “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”

arr: Kevin Olson

Worship Leaders

Organist / Pianist /

Flutist:

Lynn Hollender

Pianist / Preacher:

Erin Pacheco

Sound / Video:

Schuyler Roozeboom

Minister:

Roger Nelson

9:00 AM Service

Liturgist: Gail Rice

Prayer: Bob Rice

Soloist: Lisa Dykstra

10:15 AM Service

Acolyte: Brandon Hulford

Liturgist: Jeremy Hulford

Prayer: Liz Hulford

Soloist: Jan Kosmal

Vocalists: Jackie Archer, Carl Triemstra,
Russ Hollender

Hymns are from *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)

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Erin Hollaar Pacheco
May 2, 2021
Hope CRC, Oak Forest

Making Manifest 1 John 4:7-21

Last week, the New York Times ran an article that hit pretty close to home. Maybe you saw it. Maybe you resonated with it too. (This is contributing writer Adam Grant.)

“At first, I didn’t recognize the symptoms that we all had in common. Friends mentioned that they were having trouble concentrating. Colleagues reported that even with vaccines on the horizon, they weren’t excited about 2021...

It wasn’t burnout — we still had energy.
It wasn’t depression — we didn’t feel hopeless.
We just felt somewhat joyless and aimless.

It turns out there’s a name for that: languishing.”

On the spectrum of mental health, languishing isn’t really a *crisis*, but it certainly isn’t flourishing either. It’s a pervading sense of “feeling blah,” of “stagnation and emptiness, as if you’re muddling through your days, looking at your life through a foggy windshield.”

Since COVID emerged, we have known collective waves of anxiety, grief, frustration, and fatigue. And now, says Grant, *languishing* just “might be the dominant emotion of 2021.”

I think he might be on to something. I’m hard pressed to think of anyone right now who is flourishing—regardless of what their social media accounts would have us believe.

And I wonder if the church is languishing too. Not Hope Church, per se, but the Church, capital C — especially in this country. Poll after poll suggests a loosening sense of belonging and relevance and potency.

When faith becomes subsumed in ideology and in the polarizing ethos of our day,
When believers are increasingly divided into opposing camps,
When the community and sacrament that would hold us together has splintered and gone virtual,
What is left to call the Church?

And how much is that Church just.... languishing?

As one of our brothers at the church plant said last week, “I don’t know, but it feels like we need to pray for some kind of revival.”

How do we get from languishing to flourishing?

Today, we are four weeks deep into a sermon series through the book of 1 John.

Which seems a good spot for a little review...

1. God has sent Jesus and the Holy Spirit as advocates to come alongside you. You are not alone.
2. You are a child of God, adopted in Christ Jesus. That is who you are.
3. As beloved children of God, don't be closed off, but be ready to love, in actions and in truth.

Our text today echoes all those themes. We are used to New Testament letters written by the apostle Paul, who carefully guides his readers through a linear argument. Not so with John. John sets up his theme and then circles back to it again and again from different angles, illuminating deeper layers of understanding.

The letter reads like "a web of love":

*Behold what love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.
By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us.
Beloved, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.
This is his commandment: that we love one another.*

And now in our text, John comes at it another way. Love isn't just a command. It's the defining characteristic of God himself. *Love comes from God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

God is love's standard, love's source, and love's highest expression.

Love. As Rog pointed out last week, it's a word that means too many things. (The dictionary I checked had no less than 22 definitions.)

Love is a feeling. It's an attachment.

It can be about affection, or concern, or acceptance, or sex.

Sometimes love is altruistic and sometimes it's entirely self-centered.

Sometimes—*Young people, this one is especially for you*— "I love you" just means that I love the feelings I get from you. Same goes for "I love shopping" or coffee or cheese.

Each of us is likely to read into this text our own understanding of love. Or worse, we might even suppose that, if "God is love," then the converse is also true: love, as I see it, is God.

Which makes it easier to pat ourselves on the back for loving like God, and then go on with our day.

But John won't let us off so easy. He anchors the command to love, not just in the loving character of God, but in the actions of God that flow out of that character, the actions that define love itself. John spells it out:

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Love is the Father sending us, giving us, his only beloved Son.

And love is Jesus, who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on flesh, taking on pain and sorrow and fatigue, taking up the towel, taking their feet in his hands, taking on the shame of it all, taking the whip, taking up his cross, taking our sins, taking his last breath, bearing it all for our sakes.

One commentator put it this way: “Christ is the unveiling of God’s heart; he is God, displayed vulnerably before the world.” This is love.

It’s worth noting that sin, atonement, and final judgment are all mentioned here in our text. The love of God is not the absence of these things. Love does not deny our sin and need for a Savior. Love does not pretend that everything’s okay. Rather, love sees the need—and then steps in to meet it, no matter the cost. Love is self-sacrifice for the sake of another.

Like a mother nursing a newborn through the night.

Like staying and praying and holding the hands of the dying.

Like raising more than \$18,000 in two days for Schuyler and Corenna.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. (1 John 3:16)

Daryl Davis (some of you will know this name) is a blues pianist and a Christian. He grew up in Chicago in the sixties, and he remembers what it felt like, as a child, to have white children throw rocks at him during a parade—just because he was Black. It didn’t make any sense. “You don’t even know me. How can you hate me?”

One night in 1983, Davis was playing at a club in Maryland. Afterward, a white man came up to him to express appreciation for his musicianship. After several minutes of conversation, Davis was surprised to learn that the man was a member of the Ku Klux Klan.

That night inspired Davis’s decades-long effort to befriend Klansmen—by going to their meetings, their towns, their homes, and asking the same question he asked as a child: “How can you hate me if you don’t even know me?”

Those courageous conversations, and Daryl’s winsome way of listening well and asking good questions, have resulted in some genuine friendships. And, over the years, they have led more than 200 people to quit the Klan—often with a realization that it was their own brokenness, not his Blackness, that was at the root of their hate.

In some ways, Daryl Davis is remarkable. His is a unique call, and for him, showing the love of Christ has meant real danger and risk.

But if we are all to love as God has loved us, then the call to love is always a call to sacrificial and uncomfortable action on behalf of others. Sherri Brown puts it this way:

“We must... challenge ourselves to push beyond our comfort zones to do new things. This, indeed, is how we love as Christ loved, and as God loves us. Sacrifice can be life and limb, and when it is it should be honored as such. But it doesn't have to be. Every time we step beyond where we'd rather be, what we'd rather do, into what might embarrass or negatively impact us in order to share God's love, we answer this call.”

It's something Moe and I have been thinking about a lot lately in Garfield Park. We love our neighborhood and our neighbors and the community we're a part of there. But we also live in close proximity to gang violence and a lucrative heroin and fentanyl distribution network right around the corner that moves thousands of dollars every day, and when warm weather hits in Chicago, it's only a matter of time before someone gets hurt. Most years, we can roll with it, but this year feels worse somehow. I can't tell you how many times this spring, after the kids are in bed, Moe and I have found ourselves talking about risks and stray bullets and weighing the costs. Our kids' greatest joy during COVID has been playing out front with their neighbor friends. Do we take that away from them? Do we live with a level of risk and hope for the best? Do we move?

This is what urban ministry means for us this summer. I have no answers.

What does sacrificial love for the sake of others look like for you, in your context? What risks? What discomforts? What might you take up and bear for the sake of others?

For John, whether or not we love one another is the litmus test for whether or not we know God's love. Which is sobering. But it's also an invitation to keep coming back to God's love for you.

You are not alone. Jesus died for you and intercedes for you, the Holy Spirit walks alongside you, and the Father welcomes you as his beloved child, adopted in Christ. See what love God has lavished on us, that we are surrounded by love on all sides.

And there is nothing to fear, not even in the day of judgment. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels or demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We love because he first loved us. Immersed in that love, we live in God and he in us. It's the same word sometimes rendered “abide” or “remain,” and it shows up again and again in this text. *Whoever abides in love abides in God, and God in them.* Like the branches abide in the vine. The love of God is the root, the source, for any love we might offer to others.

It's not a bad place to return, to rest in, when we're languishing.

This little letter of 1 John is written to a church that's been rocked by some kind of schism and controversy. We don't get a lot of details; John isn't inclined to focus on cause or blame. He's mostly concerned with how the church is going to make its way out of this mess.

And so, again and again, he sends them back to the command of Jesus: “Love one another.”

The words spoken by Jesus in the upper room, after he traded status for shame and washed his disciples' feet. “Love like this. That's how everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

For John, the way out has a lot to do with love—sacrificial, risky, and uncomfortable love.

And it has a lot to do with how that love makes known, makes visible, makes manifest the love of God. *No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*

When we love, we become the embodiment of God's presence in our midst. When we love, we make God visible, even tangible, to others. When we love one another, there's a mystical sense in which God, who is love, is more present in the Church.

Which suggests that the flip side is also true. Less love for one another leads to less of a sense of God's presence in our midst.

Timothy Dalrymple, president of Christianity Today, recently wrote a piece on the splintering of the evangelical church. He points out that, when people change and choose churches to fit their politics, we end up with congregations "comprised of individuals whose informational worlds are nearly identical"—and that, in turn, leads to "rigidity and increasing radicalism." Minor disagreements become major deal-breakers, and those who disagree are increasingly treated as opponents to be fought rather than family in Christ.

John's vision, John's solution for the divided church of his day, is for them to love *each other*.

Honestly, he doesn't say much about those outside the church. Language of loving neighbors and loving enemies belongs to other parts of Scripture. John says love one another. Love the brothers and sisters that you can see. Love the church that's in front of you. The ones you agree with and the ones you don't. The ones that align with you on ideology and politics and lifestyle and the ones that don't.

What if a generous orthodoxy (I'm thinking here of the basics outlined in the Creed), combined with sacrificial love, is a better witness to the world than fighting, often lovelessly, for the particularities of our position? Can we reach across those differences with love instead?

Here's Timothy Dalrymple again:

Rather than withdrawing into communities of common loathing, the church should be offering a community of common love, a sanctuary from the fragmentation and polarization, from the loneliness and isolation of the present moment. The church should model what it means to care for one another in spite of our differences on social and political matters and affirm the incomparably deeper rootedness of our identity in Christ.

John longs for the splintered Church to know God's presence and to make it manifest to their neighbors. He longs to see them united in love – *that the world may know*.

That's where the healing is, the potency, the relevance, the revival, maybe even the flourishing.

We just have to give up ourselves to get there.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.