

Sermon for the 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity

Guest Pastor: Rev. Harald Karpe

Sermon Text: 1 John 4:7-12

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us.*

There are types of equations where you can put the numbers in reverse order and still come up with the same result. For example: 3x5 equals 15 but 5x3 also equals 15. 3+5 equals 8 and so does 5+3. This is called the commutative property. But with other types of equations, that doesn't work. 3 divided by 5 does not equal the same as 5 divided by 3. Whoever calculates like this will only get incorrect answers. It's the same with the Bible. It is constantly misapplied. God is love it says here. But the opposite conclusion is always drawn from this, saying that love is God. What is then done under the guise of love is often just pure self-love that cares about nothing else. The result is always a broken condition.

Right before our text, the apostle John reminds the listeners very clearly about the difference between the spirit of error and the Spirit of truth. That's why it's important to look closely at what love, as mentioned here, means and what it does not mean. What people call infatuation is not what is described here. With infatuation, the naughty child gets his every wish fulfilled because he is supposedly loved. All his misconduct is tolerantly overlooked. Whoever raises their child like this, or maybe more appropriately whoever does not nurture their child, harms the child and their fellow human beings. Such a stance is lovelessness. People shirk their duty of making children competent and preparing them for their jobs in life.

In the Bible it says: "A wise son hears his father's instruction..." (Proverbs 13:1) and "but he who loves him [his son] is diligent to discipline him" (Proverbs 13:24b). This does not advocate corporeal punishment, but it makes very clear that love has something to do with raising children and raising children has to do with love. Whoever loves his child will nurture the child, even it takes effort and doesn't always cause light to shine in their child's eyes. The act of raising children assumes that the parent has a relationship with the child, that the parent has gained their trust. So that the child is nurtured and not spoiled, parents must implement specific limits and adhere to those limits consistently. But within these limits, there must be a great deal of freedom. Then parents must introduce the child to responsibilities and give him support with this so that he experiences success. The child needs instruction and encouragement. Especially when the task isn't so much fun. The child must learn that it has to try and make an effort to reach its goal. Goals achieved in this way are the most satisfying. Above all, the child must know that it is unconditionally loved, despite the success of achievements and efforts. Such children grow up healthy and are then resilient too. Raising children means rules that give direction and limitations that guard against wrong paths. Whoever makes the effort to raise their children like this, proves that they truly love their children.

I sometimes ask the confirmation kids: What is it like when your mom wakes you up in the morning and you're still super tired. Do you beg her, "Mom, if you love me, then let me sleep in. It's so nice in bed. Write a note to my teachers saying I'm sick." Wouldn't that be nice? Now, a mom who doesn't love her child but wants peace of mind for herself, will say that the child can continue sleeping. The child should figure out for himself how to make it through life. A mother who loves her child will pull off the covers and maneuver

their offspring into the bathroom so they can get to school on time and learn something for later in life, even if they then grumble about their mom.

God is love. He loves His creations, above all us humans. He wants us to lead a fulfilled and meaningful life and most of all, He wants us to enter into His eternity. So in His love, He sets about working on His educational program. God gives His people commandments so that they know God's will and can direct their lives according to it. He leads and guides His people into the Promised Land. There, He creates places for them where He wants to encounter them. He presents them with blessings and curses. Curses when they stray from His commandments and blessings when they live according to them. When they stray from His commands, He disciplines them to draw them back to Himself. He calls the lost ones and brings back the ones who have strayed. His love goes out to the beloved, so much so that in His love, He Himself comes – Jesus takes upon Himself all the guilt of His beloved children and pays for their sins on the cross. His love for us makes Him capable of immeasurable suffering, such is His devotion to those He loves.

That is God's love. That is what is meant by: God is love. It's not infatuation which lets people do whatever they want and then lovingly forgive them. God, who is love, is also a holy God, the God of discipline when it's necessary and who forgives sins through Jesus Christ. Jesus wants something meaningful to come out of our lives, that we honor God by how we live, and that we reach the objective of our life: the salvation of our souls. That's why He calls every single one of us and gives us tasks according to the gifts He gave us. He places a burden upon us, but He helps us with carrying it. Jesus also sets boundaries for us sometimes when we are about to lose our way. At first glance, this can be very uncomfortable, but it would be much more uncomfortable to continue on the wrong path.

Children of God, who trust in their God, will experience God's love in everything they encounter because they know that for those who love God all things work together for good (Romans 8:28). It's not our love for Him that makes us worthy of God's love, but just the fact that we are loved by Him. Jesus gives us this love personally in the new birth of water and the Spirit. So whoever is born of God, whoever is captured by His love, only he knows God; that is, he begins to know God. This recognition means a fellowship of being and life with God, into which we grow more and more. Only when we are captured by this love of God's, only then do we truly love our neighbor.

God's nature is love. Our nature is selfish. Only God's love can love us out of our selfishness and make us able to love our neighbor – whom God also loves. We receive this love from Jesus' pierced and bloody hands. Now, with God, gifts and tasks are always inseparable. God simply can't keep His love to Himself. We too can have God's love only to the extent that we give it away. God's love shows itself most clearly in the fact that He gives Himself to us. He gives the most precious thing He has for us. With such a gift, we are immeasurably rich, so that we can now also give in return. The situation will show us what we give away.

God's love sees what we need. When we truly look after our neighbor, we will also discover what our neighbor needs. Then we can and should answer with the same supporting, forgiving, compassionate, helping love that we also constantly experience from God. That isn't a special achievement for which we then have to expect praise, but we are simply indebted to this love and never come to the end of it. We pray that we always let ourselves be loved by God and our neighbor as well as to love them in return. Amen.