

May 28, 2006
Easter 7

"You Have God's Perfect Love"

1 JOHN 4:13-21

We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

A strange headline once appeared in a San Francisco. "Love Menaces the City." It was the late 1960's. Not violence, not rioting, but love menaced the city. The Haight-Ashbury district had become the focal point of the hippie movement. The so-called flower children tried to establish within their own counter culture, a form of free love that include mind expanding drugs and an abuse of God's gift of sex reserved for a man and woman in marriage. Popular music called out to the masses: "If you are going to San Francisco, You better wear a flower in your hair." This narcissistic and self-centered love was so different from the love, the agape love, the sacrificial love, caring love that God shows us in his Word this morning.

Real love God's way is such a beautiful thing. People long for more love in their lives and in their world. You have heard the song and maybe you can even sing the tune: "What the world needs now, is love sweet love, that's the only thing there is too little of." We thrive and feed on the love we have for each other in our families. We are overwhelmed with the love the God has shown to us even while we were sinners when we did not deserve his love. Another song, and you might even be able to sing this one. "Love is a many splendored thing." When I read Psalm 103 and use it to recall my blessings, I think of the people the Lord has given to me in my life who love me and care for me, even though I have not deserved it. I think of the love that God has for me. I can say with David, "He has forgiven me of all my sins, healed me of all my diseases, redeemed me from the pit, and crowned me with love and compassion."

Love is a many splendored thing. It is also very a frustrating thing because we don't see people loving each other as they should. We don't always see the love we want to see in our homes and in our hearts. When it comes to loving as we should we must confess with Paul "The good that I want to do I don't do, the evil I don't want to do I do." This morning I consider it such a privilege to direct our hearts to the perfect pure love of God, the source of salvation, given to you as a free gift. It is a love that has come to you and a love that now flows through you.

A love that has come to you

As beautiful as the love may be that you have in your family, or in your marriage, or from your friends or members of this church, it is small by comparison to the love you have from the Lord. John says, "We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." We know. John says this again and again in this letter. He speaks with such confidence and certainly as he says, "We live in him, and he in us." Is it possible to be sure that you are in God and that God is you and that he loves you dearly? Yes, by all means this is possible and it is an every day reality in your life because according to John, "He has given us of his Holy Spirit." In John 15 Jesus says, "I am the Vine and you are the branches." It was the Holy Spirit who took dead branches like you and me and made us alive in Christ.

How can we know for sure that we are part of this pure love that God has for us? Listen more to what John says, "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God." John says, "we have seen." The word for seen has the thought of looking at something closely and drawing a conclusion from what has been seen. John was there when Jesus was dying on the cross for the sin of the world. He was there the night Jesus arose when he showed the nail marks his hands and the place where the spear had pierced his side. He also knew from what he had seen and heard that Jesus was the Son of God from all eternity and that he was world's only Savior. Notice John does not say, "I have seen" but he says, "We have seen." The Holy Spirit has given you and me faith eyes so that what happened to Jesus is as real for us this morning as it was for John. Jesus said, "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed."

How do we know? How do we know that this pure love has come down to us and is part of our lives? Look further at the evidence in your life. John says, "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God." If someone grabbed you after worship and told you to deny Jesus Christ is Lord and God, or suffer death, I know what you would say, and I know what I would say. You would say, "Take my life, I cannot give up believing that Jesus is my Lord and God." That is the evidence that you are in God, and God is in you, and his perfect love has come you're your life. Romans 10 says, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Do you want even more evidence that this perfect love has come into your life? Listen more to John speak to you this morning. "And so we know and rely on the love that God has for us." Notice again the words, "We know." How could John say: "We know." How could he be so sure? It is because we have come to rely on the love that God has for us. Think of the change that has come into your life. You were born so spiritually dead that you foolishly thought could merit God's love by the love that you would show to God in your life. If God is going to love me on the basis of my love, I am lost, because God's standard for accepting me is pure love, pure holiness and pure righteousness. God tells me in his Word: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all mind, all your strength." If that is the standard to make myself acceptable, then I know that as much as I want to love God I fall short of his expectations every hour. That is why it is such beautiful thing that we have come to rely or trust in God's love for us. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." That is love in its purest form. As an earlier verse in this

chapter tells us, "This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and gave his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Miracle of miracles. You have come to rely and trust this love for your hope of eternal, not your imperfect love that looks like a piece of Swiss cheese full of holes.

Did you ever see a news clip of a helicopter lowering a rescue worker down into a fast moving stream to rescue someone who is drowning? The rescue person does not reach down and say, "Take a hold of my hand," because if the person tries to grab a hold, there is a good chance they will fall back into the water. No, the rescue person goes down into the water, puts their arms around the drowning person, attaches a lifeline to them, holds them tight and then signals the helicopter pilot to raise them up and rescue them. So it is with God's pure love that we have come to trust in for our salvation.

A love that flows through you

When this pure love of God rescues you, it also begins to flow into your life and through your life, allowing you to live each day sure that you will not be condemned on the day of judgment. John says, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him." You live in love. You know that "Goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life." As a result of this love that fills your life you have confidence you will be safe if judgment day comes this afternoon, or tomorrow or the next day. "In this way, love is made complete among us, so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment."

A brother and sister were flying a kite on the beach on a windy foggy day. They had let out almost all their string and you could not even see the kite in the air. A man walking by said, "Are you sure the kite is still on the end of the string?" The brother said, "Yes, sir, I can feel the pull of it." So it is with God's love. Even on your worst days, you feel the pull of it. Even when you fail, you feel the pull of it as it convicts you for something you have done wrong.

The man who wrote the hymn Amazing Grace, once lived a very wild life. Then he was tamed by the amazing grace or amazing love of God that had rescued him. He wrote, "I was once a wild thing on the coast of Africa, but the Lord caught me, and now people come to see me like the lions in the Tower. Doubt if the Lord can convert the heathen? Look at me." Our hymns help us sing over and over again in many different ways, the love that God has for us that rescued us. These hymns build our confidence and hope for the future. Judgment day is coming. Every sin will be exposed. Everyone will have to give an account for how they live. The only thing that can spare me is the perfect love God has for me. That's my hope. That's your hope. It pulls at us and tugs us every minute of our lives.

John tells us this perfect love casts out fear. "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." God's perfect love has a way of having its way with us and changing us. It enters into every fiber of our being the way blood flows even to the tiniest capillaries and feeds every cell in our bodies. So when judgment day comes we can say with Paul, "I know in whom I have believed....I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. Now there is in store for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

We long for judgment day, because God's perfect love has taken away our fear.

With God's perfect love flowing through our veins and making us sure of eternal life we have the strength of being able to love each other. "We love because he first loved us." John tells us that if someone does not care about loving his brother or his wife or her husband or mom or dad, or brother or sister, how can the love of God be present in that person's life?

Dear Christian, you care. You want to love people at the highest level possible because God's perfect love is having its way with you and it is producing fruit in your life. Remember those delicious fruits of the Spirit from Galatians, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

Love is pumping through your heart, flowing through your arteries, entering into the tiniest capillaries and enabling you to pray a prayer such as this: "Lord, make me a channel of Thy peace That where there is hatred I may bring love That where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness That where there is discord I may bring harmony That where there is error I may bring truth That where there is doubt I may bring faith That where there is despair I may bring hope That where there is sadness, I may bring joy Lord, grant that I am seek rather To comfort than to be comforted To understand than to be understood To love than to be loved."

This pure and perfect love of God is such a beautiful thing. That's the love we need to see more each day. That's the love that changes us. Amen.