

1 John 4:7-21
April 29, 2018

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 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. 10 In 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. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So 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. 17 Love 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. 18 There 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. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. (NRSV)

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator, and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ! Amen.

The author of 1 John doesn't mince words; but, gets right to the heart of the matter when he explicitly and confidently proclaims, "God is love." He then goes on to explain just how he can so assuredly make this statement, "God's love was revealed among us this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In 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." It is through Christ's death and resurrection the author can make such a claim. The gift of the Holy Spirit has equipped him to see and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world.

God is love! This seems such a simple assertion and I would guess that if we went around our worship space and asked one another to identify a characteristic of God love would be near the top of each of our lists. Yet, for many that isn't the case. It wasn't so long ago in confirmation class we were speaking of Christ's death and as is the norm every year the question arises that basically boils down to this, "How can a God of love send his Son to die in such an awful way?" It's a great question and I suspect one each of us has grappled with at some point in our lives and I suspect it is one many who don't yet know about God's great love struggle to comprehend.

I, too, can remember posing a similar question when I was their age and it took me a lot of years to come to the realization my question stemmed from a complete misunderstanding of who God is. God is love. Yet, I came from an angle that saw a God not of love; but rather, I saw a God of anger and wrath toward God's people. I saw a God who seemingly took this anger out on his Son with marching orders to suffer a humiliating, brutal, and agonizing death all because of my sins and the sins of others. I wasn't sure this is a God I wanted to follow and that at times this was reinforced through actions of the church toward one another. If God is love and God's love abides in God's people, then how in the

world can we be so mean to one another? Especially, within the church. I really struggled to see just how God is love.

It wasn't until I came to the understanding that Jesus was not simply human; but, Jesus was and is also fully God that I could grasp God is love. It's what we confess in the words of the Nicene Creed, "We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, God of God, Light from Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. The author of 1 John is clearly working through the lenses of the gospel of John where right from the 1st verse of the book we recall, "In the beginning was the Word [i.e. Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." When my mind finally made that connection - Jesus was and is God – it was only then I could finally align God is love with the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Viewed through this lens, I no longer saw an angry, vengeful, and wrathful God but I finally saw a God of love. A God of grace. A God who came into the world in a new way to experience life in the flesh as we experience. The struggles. The pain. The illness. The temptations. The fears. The toll sin and death have on our mortal beings. And then I saw God, in Jesus, truly having done the unthinkable. Suffering the same death, we will suffer so that we can experience the same resurrection he experiences. This is not a God of anger; no this is a God

of love laying down his life so that we might live. God is love and God's love does indeed cast out fear. The fear of death. The fear of being able to approach God because of some past sin. God laying down God's life for the world. For you and me. God is love! Amen.