

INI - SDG
6th Sunday a. Epiphany
February 14, 2010
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hecla, SD

Text: 1 John 4:7-11 *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, 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 propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

Theme: GOD'S VALENTINE TO YOU
- Revealed in His Son
- Reflected in us

Dear beloved of God, sinners made saints by the love of God in Jesus Christ,

Today, February 14 has become synonymous with cards, flowers, and candy hearts with phrases of love on them. Grade school students often make a boxes and exchange Valentine's Day cards with their classmates. Here at Prince of Peace we have the tradition of the men putting together a pancake dinner for the women. Valentine's Day is an opportunity for men and women alike to let that special someone know how much they mean to them. Some protest this day, claiming it is an over commercialized holiday and men are pressured to do something for the women in their lives not out of love, but by compulsion. But it is what it is - an opportunity to address the topic of love.

Depending on your purpose, there are different Valentine's Day cards for different relationships. For instance, if you are buying a Valentine's Day card for your spouse, you will find one expresses the deep love you have for him or her. If, however, you are buying Valentine's Day cards for your 5th grade classmates, you will probably avoid cards that are overly romantic. When I was in grade school I usually picked the Valentine's Day cards that had either GI Joe or a Transformer on it, so no one got the wrong idea.

If God were to send a Valentine's Day card to you, what would it say? How would God express His love for you? Well, we don't have to guess how God would express His love for you. We have an entire book full of expressions of God's love. Our text from 1 John is one clear example. In just a few verses we have one of the most concise and powerful expressions in all of Scripture of God's love. Let us consider today "God's Valentine for You." How it is revealed in His Son and reflected in us. May God the Holy Spirit guide us into His love.

REVEALED IN HIS SON

"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight For the ends of being and ideal grace." This love sonnet by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, is possibly one of the most famous love poems ever written. Yet I have to confess, I have no idea what she is talking about. It sounds flowing and lovely to the ear, but I get lost in the language.

The Apostle John, however, does not mince words. John is often referred to as the apostle of love. And reading our text you can see why. In the five books of the New Testament attributed to the Apostle John, the word "love" is used 72 times. But unlike Ms. Browning, here in our text there is no mistaking the point John is making about love. Quite simply in verse 8 John writes, **"God is love."** Love is who God is and love what God does. God is that agape love - that sacrificial love. Love that puts the needs of others ahead of self. Love that sees a need and does something about it. Love that does not merely *feel* a certain way about someone else, but love that does something for another.

John does not simply say, **"Love is of God"** and **"God is love,"** and just leave it there. John leaves no doubt that God is love. He writes in verse 9, **"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him."** Which one of you would choose to send your son or daughter to live in Haiti right now so that a Haitian child could live here? Or how about Iran or North Korea? None of us would ever want to send our sons or daughters to live in such a place. These are lands that have horrible living conditions or governments that treat Americans roughly. None of us would want to send the children whom we love to places such as these.

The stark contrast between Haiti and the United States cannot even BEGIN to compare God sending His one and only Son from heaven to earth. He sent His Son from the glory and joy in heaven to the humiliation of earth - full of sin, disease, and sadness. In doing so, God revealed His love. Think of what this meant for God. God sent that which was most precious to Him, His Son, to a place that disappointed Him the most - this world of sin and death. And He did it because He is love. He sent His Son from heaven to earth, so that we here on earth might be able to go to heaven.

John continues to show that God is love in verse 10. **"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."** John points out that the big love is not seen in us loving God. First of all because we the creature OWED God, our Creator, our love. It was love that was commanded - to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our mind. We were indebted to God for that kind of love.

Furthermore we have failed to give our God that kind of love. We were born into this world with calloused hearts of stone, not hearts overflowing with love. We did not love the LORD our God as we should have. In fact, by nature, we were at enmity with God. We did not have a loving relationship, but a hostile one. We did not love God, even though we should have.

God shows us what real love is. We who were sinful enemies of God are the very ones He loved. He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. That word "propitiation" is one we are not that familiar with, but it is an important Biblical concept. It means that the Son of God was sent to be the sacrifice to give us the forgiveness of our sins. The Son was the payment that had to be made for us to be forgiven and at peace with God.

This, then, is what love truly is! Love that is as big as God Himself, for God is love. Love that the world has no idea about. Love that cannot be captured in a picture, poem, or song. Love that is seen in the cross of Jesus Christ. God did not simply talk about loving us or have loving thoughts about us, God loved us and was determined to do something about our lost and condemned condition. Paul writes, **"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Rom 5:8) When there was nothing admirable or lovable about us, while we were still sinners, enemies of God, He demonstrated His love by giving His Son to die for us.

So this is God's Valentine for you God sending His Son to save you and give you life!

REFLECTED IN US

How many Valentine's Day cards do you suppose you have gotten over the years? Probably countless as a grade schooler. Probably a couple as a teenager. Maybe a few as an adult. Do you know where all those Valentine's Day cards are now? Maybe you kept some as a keep-safe, but most you probably lost or threw away. Those little cards you got at school maybe never even made it home! Most of us were probably more interested in the candy than the card and the words written on it.

Well, what are we going to do with God's Valentine to us? We have heard about the love of God before, haven't we? On Christmas Eve our Sunday School children told us about how God loved us dearly. And yet how quickly we forget about that amazing, undeserved love God has had on us! In the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, Jesus addresses the church in Ephesus. He praises them for their labor in the Lord and their hatred of false doctrine. But He also says, **"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."** (Rev 2:4) It seems they were so diligent in their battle against false doctrine that they lost sight of the love of the Gospel! It is as though they tossed away the Valentine God had made for them!

God does not want it to be that way. He does not want our knowledge of the Gospel to be only in our heads, but a matter of the heart. The love of God in our lives is to spill over into our relationships with one another. John writes in the first two verses of our text, **"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God for God is love."** The love God has for us and the love we have for one another goes hand-in-hand. How can someone hear the Gospel, believe in the Gospel, but not have the love of the Gospel flow into their lives with fellow believers? John says it is impossible. Those whom the Holy Spirit has brought to faith in the Gospel will bear the fruits of love in their lives.

John continues in the last verse of our text, **"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."** First of John calls us, **"Beloved,"** and that is what we are. We are the beloved of God. God has loved us and given us His own beloved Son as a sacrifice for our sins. And if God so loved us, we ought to love one another just as much. And by this, Jesus says, **"all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."** (Jn 13:35)

This love imitates God's love for us. It is not an emotional feeling we have about one another. It is not just loving thoughts that we have about our fellow believer. It is more than that. It is that agape love - sacrificial love, love in action, love that does something. John has more to say on this love in action in chapter 3 when he writes, **"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."** (1 Jn 3:16-18) Love for one another that does something. It is God's Gospel Valentine that is reflected in us.

Valentine's Day is a secular holiday that only comes once a year. May God's love in our lives not be so limited. God is love and love is of God. His love is an eternal love. A love that has no beginning and no end. Love that can most clearly be seen when His Son died on the cross. May the Holy Spirit help us to always reflect that love in our relationship with one another. Praise be to God for His endless love! Amen.