

I John 4:13-21 May 29, 2016

¹³ 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. "

Have you ever been tongued-tied, at a complete loss for words? Perhaps it was when you received a totally unexpected, large gift. Perhaps it was, if you, as a husband, were present in the delivery room, when your wife gave birth to your first-born child. It's moments like that when we very well may be at a loss for words, completely tongue-tied.

Or it might be, at other times, seeing the Rocky Mountains for the first time when a single word just does not seem adequate to what we are seeing. A picture may be worth a thousand words. But there are times a few more words than one would seem fitting for something spectacular we've just seen.

And yet today, we boldly assert, a single word, love is the answer. How in the world can a single word, even a powerful word like love, be the answer to two great questions: knowing God and loving others? Fourteen times in the 8 verses of our text, that single word, love is used. Let's listen and learn again how LOVE IS THE ANSWER I. To knowing God and II. Loving Others.

This Sunday we are at the end of the Festival Half of the Church Year. It began with Christmas. By this time, standing on the edge of summer, Christmas seems a long way away. Even Easter may seem like a distant memory, now weeks ago.

But not long before the first Easter, the night Jesus was betrayed, Jesus promised his disciples a special gift of the Holy Spirit. At his ascension, celebrated by the Christian church recently, Jesus told his anxious disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit's special gift. And they didn't have long to wait. 10 days later, on Pentecost, in spectacular fashion, the Holy Spirit was given, as we witnessed two weeks ago.

But Jesus' promise of the Spirit's presence was not just for his first-century disciples. The Holy Spirit has been given to us, too. As John tells us here today, the Holy Spirit is responsible for our knowing God.

"We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father 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."

It's like the air we breathe which gives life to our bodies. The Holy Spirit, his very name means breathe, animates the spiritual life in us. He alone is responsible for the new spiritual life within us, turning our hearts to faith in God. And so our faith in God is evidence of the Holy Spirit living in us. And this new spiritual life within us finds expression in what our lips say about Jesus.

It was no different for the Apostle John. John was one of the privileged few to spend three years with Jesus. John, along with the other 11, was often amazed at the words coming from Jesus lips, at the deeds done by his

hands. On one occasion, seeing him effortlessly, by merely speaking some words, calm an angry sea, they remarked. "What manner of man is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?"

But sometimes their wonder and amazement bordered on disbelief. On time, when Jesus, graphically, described his suffering and death, Peter, emphatically, responded, "Never, Lord!"

When at his arrest, all the disciples forsook him and fled, when at his cross, only John stood beneath it, looking up, it was plain the special gift of the Spirit was needed to give them kreal insight into what they were seeing. And now old man John, in whose heart the Holy Spirit for nearly a century had been at work, testified to the very heart of the gospel.

"The Father sent his son to be the Savior of the world."

It isn't many words, actually it's only one word, love is the answer. As God's Spirit had also inspired John to write. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Love is the answer! Only the understanding and purposeful love of God the Father can explain God's caring for a fallen world. Only the understanding and purposeful love of God's Son can explain what kept him on the cross when there was so little appreciation for what he was doing there. Only the understanding and purposeful love of God the Holy Spirit explains our exclamation of faith: Jesus is the Son of God. Only the understanding and purposeful love of the Triune God could bring about the phenomenon that God, by faith, actually lives in us and we with God.

Love is the answer! But knowing love is the answer to knowing God seems so philosophical. Do you want to see the practical side of knowing love is the answer? Just listen and learn some more how John describes love as the answer to a very important, practical question.

"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.

The ultimate purpose of knowing about God's love is relying on the love God has for us. God's love reaches its goal for us, it is complete, when it gives us the confidence, unafraid, to stand before the holy God on the last day, judgment day.

If we are still afraid of the last day, judgment day, God's love has not yet reached its goal for us. But how could we not be afraid of Judgment Day? Remember, when our parents were away, doing something we knew they told us not to do? We were fearful of their return, discovering what we had done. Just hearing the sound of their car in the driveway, hearing the sound of their voice as they opened the door, "We're home; where are you?" Their presence filled us with frantic fear.

Shouldn't it be the same, then, at the sound of God's return on the last day, Judgment Day? Or haven't we done anything he told us not to do? Let's be totally honest. There is many a thought, word, or deed which should fill us rebels with mortal fear just at the thought of God's final return in judgment.

But if that's the case with us, just listen to John again. "There is no fear in love. For perfect love drives out fear. Fear has to do with punishment. The one who still fears is not made perfect in love."

To see why we need not fear the Lord's re turn, let's go back to something John told us a moment ago. "In this world we are like him", like Jesus, John means. After, successfully, innocently, bearing the sins of the entire world, dying for them on the cross, Jesus was unafraid to face his Holy, Heavenly Father. "Father, into your

hands I deposit my spirit”, were Jesus’ last words from the cross. It can be the same for you and me when we know love is the answer.

Tomorrow our nation celebrates Memorial Day. We remember those who loved freedom so much they were willing to die for it. In many cases the freedom for which they fought, they would never enjoy; they died to win or preserve freedom for others. And those others, you and me, they never knew us and yet they died for us.

God’s love goes even beyond the sacrifice those brave men made, dying for people they never knew. Jesus knew who and what we were. Perhaps those who died to win or preserve our freedoms would not have been so willing to die if they knew, today, how little appreciated or abused the freedom is for which they died. But that’s precisely the situation when Jesus died.

Jesus knew who and what we were. He knew our rebellious nature. He knows, even if we do not, every wayward act we have ever committed. And yet he was willing to die for us, pardoning us. And that’s why love is the answer to knowing God even as, remembering what he did for us, love is also the answer to loving others.

Again, love is the answer to our loving others. And, once again, God’s love has to come first. We can love God, love others as well, only because God loved us first. But all of this is only possible when love, real love, God’s kind of love, is the answer.

If we were to goggle the word love, it well might be one of the most popular words in the English language, especially in the songs people sing. But the word love would be far less common, if, in the English language, like the Greek language, there was more than one word for love.

True, the English language does use other words to describe lesser, less desirable forms of love. Some forms of love are described as erotic. It’s a base, immoral kind of love which enflames the passions, pursuing selfish ends, even physical assault, even hurting another person. Obviously that kind of love is not the answer to loving others.

A higher form of love is the feelings friends have for each other. Friendship love can be a very wholesome thing, with both parties benefiting from their relationship. But despite its many good qualities, it can still have a selfish side to it. And that’s why friendships often end when needs are not mutually being met. That kind of love, too, is not the answer to loving others.

Notice, then, how John, from a negative perspective, tells us how love can be the answer to loving others. “If someone says, I love God, yet hates his brothers, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

Did you notice the tough love John uses as he tells us how love can be the answer to loving others? John’s words, again, were. If someone says, I love God; it’s only my brother, or sister, someone else I hate. John bluntly says, He lying. For it’s impossible to love God and hate someone else.

It all goes back again to what word for love is the answer to loving others. If the kind of love we have for others is the kind of love that thinks selfishly always of me first, before anyone else, it will always be hard to love others. Because, just like you and me, they may always be doing or saying something which, at least to our way of thinking, makes them unworthy of our love, naturally speaking, others are hard to love.

Again, what would have become of us, if, in order for God to love us, we had to be worthy of his love? We would never have known God’s love if we had to love him first, perfectly, before he ever loved us. Obviously, that kind of love is not the answer to loving others.

God's kind of love is, an understanding, purposeful love. He knew how unworthy we were of his love but he loved us still the same. His purpose was to redeem us, to win forgiveness for us. And even as his love united us to him, forever, it was to inspire us now, with that same kind of understanding and purposeful love, toward others.

And that is why, in the Ten Commandment, after showing us how, in the first three commandments, we can show love for our God who loved us first, he gives us 7 ways to display that same kind of love toward others.

Love is the answer to loving God and loving others. Love is the answer, though, only when it is the same kind of love God first showed to us. And because, in Jesus Christ he did and does, may his love for us inspire our love for others!