

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## God's Love Abides

## Epistle Lesson

1 John 3:16-24 (NRSV)

<sup>16</sup>We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. <sup>17</sup>How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

<sup>18</sup>Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. <sup>19</sup>And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him <sup>20</sup>whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup>Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; <sup>22</sup>and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

<sup>23</sup>And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup>All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

## Bible/Sermon Focus

This week Pastor Andy quoted New Testament Professor Dr. Sherri Brown talking about the church. She says, "The new community is formed upon Jesus Christ's commandments of believing and loving in him that lead to an outward-turning orientation toward social justice. The trajectory is a theology that leads to Christology, which forms an ecclesiology that manifests ethical action."

Let's break down that quote. It is in our love for and belief in Jesus that our lives are directed toward loving our neighbor. With Christ at the center of our lives we cannot help but respond to God's love, by being more loving in the world. And though we often like to think of love as just a feeling, it is indeed also an action. We respond in the world by doing our part to bring about the Kingdom of God. The "trajectory" for us Christians is a belief in a loving God, that leads us to a belief in Christ, which forms a church that does the right thing (Editor's note: "The next right thing").

And the thing about a beloved community made up of many different, diverse members, is that our unity doesn't have to be based on "ascribing to correct belief, but by being in relationship with Jesus and loving one another. The end result is the same - a resolution of a cognitive dissonance in the community." It's a resolution of the tension that can and sometimes will exist between us.

As members together we choose to be part of a church community that isn't trying to change each other's minds to get us all to believe exactly the same things. It's just not who we are. We know that there are indeed denominations and congregations where that is a value they hold, and that's fine too.

Witnessing the ultimate love of God transcend our supposed divisions is part of the life that we get to experience together. It's holy. It's life changing. It's truly grace-filled.

There are people who have not yet got to come into a community like this. They're out there and we have the opportunity to orient our lives in a way where we are examples of the Good News of God. We can invite them to be part of this thing we are doing ... this thing that God is doing.

## Discussion Questions

1. When have you experienced cognitive dissonance?
2. The authors of 1<sup>st</sup> John do not directly address the conflict that the community is having but instead encourage the community to keep going, maintain their trajectory and to love each other. When have you dealt with conflict in this way?
3. Reflect on the quote from Sunday's sermon, "Resolving the cognitive dissonance between what we believe about God's love and the way we do (or do not) share it with our neighbors is an important step in our becoming more like Christ, more fully human."
4. How have you shared the good news (done evangelism) in the last week?

## Prayer

Divine Parent, we thank you for the diversity of your children. We thank you for the diversity of your creation. Help us to love like you. Help us be your church. Turn our hearts and attention toward you. We pray for your church. We pray for each other, in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Spirit, Amen.

*Resolving the cognitive dissonance between what we Believe about God's love and the way we do (or do not) share it with our neighbors is an important step in our becoming more like Christ, more fully human.*