

Sunday 20th September 2020

1 John 4:7-21 (Love and Fear)

Talk by Ian Baldwin, Prayers by Julian Providence

Hello, and welcome to our service. Today we will be thinking about how "Love and fear" by looking at a bible reading from 1 John ch4 v7-21.

Let me pray as we start.

Lord thank you that we can take this time to focus on you. Help us to set aside all the business and worries of the week so we might listen to you and know your peace. Amen.

Let us now take some time to think about how the week has gone. There may be times when our attitude or actions have not been as Jesus would want.

A moment of quiet as we come before the throne of grace.

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are a merciful and loving Father. Please forgive us for the things we have said and done that were not loving or kind and forgive us any hurt we may have caused. Amen.

Psalm 103 v2-4 'Praise the Lord O my soul and forget not all his benefits - who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases and redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion'.

Now Julian will lead us in our intercessions before I read and speak.

Prayers

Let us pray.

Lord we bring before you our church family in need:

We pray for Carol who used to attend St John's and her husband Tony. We ask for your healing touch to be on Carol in hospital with heart problems. Please comfort her, give strength to her heart and thank you that she is able to get the treatment she needs. We pray for peace for Tony and that he would know of your presence throughout these difficult days.

We pray continued healing for Val. Please strengthen her to improve her mobility.

For Joon and Jeonghee that they continue to settle and find a home and a church family in Edinburgh. Please watch over them and help them settle into their studies.

For those recently bereaved, thinking of Yvette, Emma, Margaret and Tom.

We pray for Yvette's sons as they settle into university life and study. Please help them find their feet and find focus on their studies.

We pray for CAP, thanking you for all you are doing through Lin, Rachel and Gareth. Please be with them - protect and uphold them. We lift those who you have brought to our attention in the CAP newsletter this month. Thank you, God, that you are able to meet all these needs and we pray that those who are supported through CAP will see you and come to know you for themselves.

Lord we thank you that you continue to sustain St John's – thank you for how you have blessed us with people able to lead and organise, manage finances, support children and youth groups, create beautiful things for the church building and give pastoral care among many other things. Lord you know and love and care for each one of us, not because of what we are able to do but simply as a chosen people, holy and dearly loved (Col 3:12). Help us to remain in you Lord as you also remain in us (John 15:4) and not to give up meeting together while we cannot meet in person.

We pray for our world:

We pray over our nation as a second wave of coronavirus is now appearing. Help our government and health and scientific experts to start planning wisely now for the coming weeks and months, especially with the approach of winter and the risk of flu. Please be with us as a nation and defend us from the full impact of a second wave. We pray also for the fallout from this pandemic - for those who are suffering anxiety, stress and physical ill health; for those who've lost jobs and businesses; for those children who've you've lost out from school closures or downgrading of exam results. Bring healing to our nation, God of light and hope and restoration. Please lead us through these difficult days. We pray your voice would speak into people's darkness. Give your church the compassion and wisdom to speak your truth and hope into the life of this nation and help our government to find the resources to help those in need.

We pray the same for the world as many countries are now suffering deaths and hardships far greater than our own. Have mercy on these nations.

Lord we think about our world and how much of this beautiful and amazing world you gave us is disappearing. There are wildfires in California and Oregon, in the Brazilian Wetlands and in Siberia and melting ice sheets. We pray especially for those poorer nations of the world who will be hardest hit by climate change, many of who are already ravaged by war and dictatorships. We think of Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, and many countries in Africa. We have put the gods of money and power before you, the God and Creator of this world. Forgive us Lord and thank you that you still love this world and wait patiently for people to respond to your call. Thank you most of all that even when the heavens and this world have passed away, we will have an eternal home with you. Thank you, Jesus, for your sacrifice that brought us life even when we were dead in our sins. Help us still to care for your world but also to share your hope in this world of need.

Finally, we pray together:

Our Father in heaven

Hallowed be your name

Your kingdom come

Your will be done on earth as in heaven

Give us today our daily bread

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours - now and forever.

Amen.

Our reading is 1 John ch4 v7-21

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they 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 them. 17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. 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 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

This is the word of God.

We live in unprecedented times where much is changing. There is uncertainty which leads to anxiety and fears, but we have also seen acts of kindness and love often from unexpected places.

In John's letter love is a central theme. Love is mentioned nearly 40 times in chapter 4 and 24 of those are in our reading. So why does John keep mentioning love and the phrase "love one another"? Well John is using love as the supreme test of the genuineness of our faith. Love has its origin in God, indeed v16 says God is love. We are made in the image of God and have God as our father therefore we are born of God and should display the characteristics of our parent.

Love is seen as central and so if we are to become all we are called to be and meant to be we must love also. It is a two-way action. In knowing God we learn to love and in loving God we learn more of him. So, love comes from God and yet love leads to God.

In v9-10 we read "this is how God showed his love amongst us: He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

We have here a concise description of the gospel. Jesus came as the physical presence of God among us, the revelation of God's love. In Jesus we see the essence of God and the fullness of his love. Nothing is held back. In Jesus' death and resurrection there can be no greater expression of love. John 15v12 records Jesus' words to his disciples "My command is this : love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command".

Jesus bridged that gap between us and God. He brought the opportunity for fullness of life and the strength to live it and also the peace in which to live. God's love did not stop when Jesus returned to heaven for it is ongoing, continuous a never-ending stream of love. When we see all God has done for us how can we not love him in return.

While the gift of Jesus assures us of God's love it also brings the obligation to love others. Now we cannot see God but we can see the effects of his love amongst us. There is at work a sequence: God is love, God loved us first, we love one another and God lives in us. This is the way God's love is completed or perfected in us as part of our maturing in Christ.

We may not have clever words to persuade people into God's kingdom, but we never underestimate the power of love in action.

John was an eyewitness to Jesus' life and works and he knew that Jesus was God's saviour of the world. The Spirit was God's witness to the church. So, our faith is based upon the historical life of Jesus and the experience of the Holy Spirit's work. Because of this we know we are saved from the punishment of sin and this should help us face the temptation, fears and anxieties of life.

When we profess that Jesus is Lord we do so because of God's spirit in us 1Cor 12v3 "no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy spirit" God's Holy Spirit in us is the evidence of our faith. The idea of God in us and we in him. It is the Holy Spirit that brings light to our minds and helps us seek God, to be aware of the presence of God and to have the assurance of peace and to call God Father. Faith and love are gifts of God in which we gain confidence to live / abide in Christ as his love is lived out and perfected in us.

It is the perfected love in us that drives out fear. Fear is an emotion often about punishment. If all we know of God is the angry judge, the harsh law giver, or the vengeful supreme king we can expect nothing in our heart but fear.

However, if we know about the God of love and his true nature then we can come before God in prayer, in confession, in communion and worship and all because God's love expressed in Jesus. To know we are accepted by God because of Jesus then our fear is eclipsed by his love. This is why John writes that there is no room for fear in love. We love and revere God, but we cannot approach God in love and hide in fear at the same time. That is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Total love and total fear cannot co-exist. We often live in the middle where we are not experiencing the fullness of God's love yet spared the worst of fear. It is like living in the shadow of punishment.

Our Christian character should be governed by love not fear as true love is a response to God's love. Fear is to do with our sinful nature and should be cast out when we accept Jesus as our saviour and allow his love to be perfected in us. This does not mean we will never have moments or times of fear and anxiety for they are very real emotions and are often our bodies warnings and safety mechanisms. Of course, a fear of grieving God's love remains a healthy reminder of our dependence on the grace of God.

Now if perfect love casts out fear it also casts out hatred. John is saying to us act as you speak, to do as we say, walk the talk. i.e. no contradiction in our lives as that makes us out to be liars. Hence the teaching on love also applies to obedience.

We cannot claim to know God, yet deny Jesus, for that is a denial of Christ.

We cannot claim to love God, yet hate our fellow Christian, for that is like self-hatred.
We cannot claim to know God, yet walk in the darkness of disobedience, for that is habitual sin.
Instead God's love in us produces faith, holiness and love. So, it is obvious that if we cannot love our fellow Christians how can we love God. We can deceive ourselves, but our actions will show the truth. If we love God we will obey his commands and as Jesus said in Matt 22v37-40 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

To love God and our neighbours is not an easy thing to do but it is what we are called to do, and God's spirit is with us. God knows how difficult people can be and he also knows how difficult we can be! It is good to know the God we serve is a patient, gracious and loving God.

AMEN

A closing prayer

The Lord bless us and keep us
The Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us
The Lord turn his face towards us and give us peace.
Amen.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and may God bless you in the coming week.