

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"What God Looks Like"
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5th Sunday of Easter

Love is one of those tricky subjects. It is something like talking about humility. You might be able to talk really well about it, but the talking about it doesn't count for much. Talking about love can be as elusive as talking about what God looks like. You know some of the things young children have said about who God looks like.

The young child says, you know what God's like from his name. Well then, the adult asks, "What's his name?" And the child responds, "Harold." "Harold? The adult wonders, "Where did you get the idea that his name is Harold?" "Well, you know, says the youngster, like the song says, "Hark the Harold, angels sing."
Or perhaps another says that God's name is Andy. You know like the song says, "Andy walks with me, Andy talks with me..."

Well we don't know what God looks like, except as we look at Jesus, as Jesus said in John 14, "when you have seen me, you have seen the Father." And we also know a little about what God looks like as we are made in God's image, male and female together.

In his first letter to Christians, John emphasizes love. In John's gospel, Jesus told the disciples in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday that everyone would know we are his disciples as we love one another. It becomes our mark, our brand, if you will. It is the new commandment that is not so new.

John in his letter in the fourth chapter exaggerates positively by saying that everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. If you truly love, you have learned this from God, whether explicitly or implicitly. And then he exaggerates negatively and says that if anyone does not love, they can't possibly know God, because God is love. So if you are not being loving in your actions you prove you are an unbeliever. Both these statements exaggerate to make a point. That point is this: your actions will show your heart condition better than your words.

We have some real gems here in this church who love consistently and wonderfully and creatively. We know who they are. We also know ourselves. We know how inconsistent we are in loving, in patience, in constant kind words. At least I know I am like that. Let me give an example.

Since I was a young child, youngest of three brothers, I have been competitive. I suppose in some way, it was a survival mechanism, keeping up, or trying to keep up with two guys seven and ten years old than me. I was competitive in sports at school, at cards at home, at board games; you name it. What I have learned over the years is that not everyone is competitive. Others do actually play the game just for fun or for the social experience. Not me. I need to win. So when I carpet bowl with the Good Companions on Thursday afternoons, I can be mean with competitive comments. I apologize here not simply to those who have received those comments, but to the whole group. Because in order to be in the game, I have to care about winning. If you care more about winning than loving, you are in trouble in your relationships. And you know I am talking about a lot more than bowling.

John makes it clear that we need to care for each other, to put others' needs first and to put legs under that big word love. So often we can make love just another four letter word. We can make a feeling, like the top forty song by Cobra Starship, "You make feel so na na na na na, na na na na" Love is a kind of a...fill in the blank...feeling.

But love is so much more than some nebulous feeling that you get in a human relationship. It is the way God showed us how much he cares, in sending Jesus. He loves us first, in creation, and in redemption. And so because God has taken the initiative with us, he encourages us to take the initiative in loving others creatively and consistently. And that's hard, particularly if the other person is not very lovable. It's easy to love the gems, the ones that care for you no matter what. It's harder to love those who are constantly negative, amazingly selfish and thoroughly difficult in creative ways. And if someone tells you it is easy, they are not telling you the truth.

The way we know the truth is by the fact that God the Father gives us his Holy Spirit to help us discern the truth. That truth starts with Jesus as the Son of God, acknowledging him, and giving ourselves to him. How can we

give ourselves to someone we have not seen? John says nobody has ever seen God, not in the fullness of who he is, although in his gospel, he makes it clear that Jesus has seen him and displays him thoroughly. But the rest of us human beings have not seen God. But then here is a beautiful promise: when we love one another, creatively putting others' best first, we see God at work. Love shows us something of God.

If we have eyes to see, we will see others loving, sacrificially, carefully, wonderfully, amazingly and we will see God at work. Now I know that there are those who dysfunctionally try to serve others, not in a healthy way, but in a way to get their own needs met, to try and please others and never measure up. The counterfeit and the abuse do not negate the reality and the beauty of true love, true service, kind words, loving acts, touching encouragement.

Living out a loving attitude (which doesn't mean constant agreement) and loving deeds shows a person's life has been touched by God. Generosity shows this to individuals, to the mission of the church, to fun things that support our youth like Friday night. Love finds a way.

Love works itself out as we trust God and as we trust one another. Love works itself into a place of peace rather than fear. If we are afraid of facing God in the end at the judgment, we haven't taken in the fullness of his love. We need to take that love in deeply, so that we aren't driven by fear. Fear and anxiety motivate us too often. Security systems, pre-nuptial contracts, bars on the windows don't do what we think they might. We try to control the bad, and leverage the good. But John says, when you see someone who is related to you and you hurt them rather than help them, please don't go on and on about your faith and relationship to God. Instead, go to that person you have hurt, and ask forgiveness for what you have done. Go and make it right.

Is there someone in your life that you are close to, someone who God brings to mind right now to whom ssssy you need to go and be reconciled, as much as it depends on you. Don't hesitate to try and make it right. Ask someone else to help you make a strategy to make it right, if you are finding it hard to do it yourself. And if you can't think of anyone in this category, ask someone close to you if they know of someone with whom they think you need to make amends or ask forgiveness or simply approach and talk to.

You want to know how to love God better. Address these human relationships, and you will know how to love God better. You want to know how to love people better in your circle of friends, family, neighbors and others God puts in your path? Love God, ask God how to love, and you will be given the creative way, as you ask. Just don't lie. Tell the truth about how bad it is. Or be thankful for how good it is. Get help. Don't try to manage it alone. God has given us each other. And if I can help, please tell me how.

We can't see God, but we can see God at work as we love one another.

Let us pray.