

Resurrection Love

**1 John 4:7-21
John 15:1-8**

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Someone asked me the other day, "Do you think that people can see we are Christians? Do our lives look any different than the lives of our neighbors? Does our belief in Jesus change the way we live?"

He wasn't so sure.

What do you think?

What would you tell my friend?

St. John would certainly have an answer.

Let's hear him, as Dorothy reads for us:

1 JOHN 4:7-21

One word defines the impact that our belief in Jesus has on our lives:

Love.

A few years ago country singer Sheryl Crow said the following in an interview:

I think everybody on the planet feels alone, deep inside they feel alone, even when they're in relationships with other people....I don't want to spend the rest of my life alone like that. That's the only true fear I have, because what else is there but love? Not to sound completely elementary, but it's what people have written songs about for hundreds of years, and it's really the only thing that matters. It's what motivates you, edifies you, encourages you. It's what brings you the most joy and the most wisdom. So that is what I long for—the consummate love.

Interview magazine (10-01-98);

The consummate love.

Friends, that is the love which the apostle John describes to us.

But the powerful love of God that comes to us in Jesus.

Lavishly poured onto us - No matter who we are.

Or where we're from.

Or what we're like.

Or what we've done.

He loves us!

Can you believe that?

No matter what family we come from.

Or where we've been.

Or how we've behaved.

Or the secrets we keep.

He loves us.

It is the very central essence of God.

Verse 8:

God **IS** love!

It's not just what He **does**.

It's who He **is!**

The consummate love;

Easter Love.

Resurrection love.

God's love is seen around us in many ways every day. But the greatest way we see it is in the historical event of God's one and only, precious Son;

who came to find us,

unlovable, undeserving people.

Seeking our eternal good at His personal expense.
There couldn't have been a greater cost,
nor a greater expression of care and concern -
a greater sacrifice of love
-- than the life of God's son.... None!

He was, says verse 10, the atoning sacrifice --
the one who took distant humanity and made them One with God.
Atonement - **at... one... ment.**

Romans 5.8 puts it this way: "*God demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"
That's it!!

The events Good Friday and Easter -
- those are love-events, friends!
Events that echo right down into our lives today.

Easter brings us that love

AND

that invites us to pass it along.

And when we do, when we pass along the love of God to someone else,
we fulfill that love.
Can you believe that?

God's everlasting love for you.
Christ's enormous work on the cross and in the grave.
All of that is, in some way,

incomplete.

Check out verse 12:

*No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is **perfected** in us.*

God's love is complete when it is reproduced in us.
His love is fulfilled when we pass it along.
Not before then.

Those of you that are married know what I'm talking about.
A great desire of most couples when they marry is to have children.
And one of the greatest tragedies, and burdens, for couples is infertility.
Over the years many have shared with me how being unable to have children has left them feeling ***incomplete.***

Their love for each other is filled up, completed, when it is reproduced in a child,
a little image of the parents,
sharing their lives, their features, their personalities.

God wants to see us move and walk and talk in love -
mirroring His love;

children of the Father; who **look** like Him, act like Him.

ONLY then is His love complete.

That's why John says, "Go... love!"

John reminds us in verse 12 that no one has ever seen God.
You can't just reach out and grab hold of God;
touch, smell, or see Him.

So -- how can people come to know Him?
Well, says John, people come to reach out and grab hold of God;
they can touch and smell and see Him through his people,
when and **if** those people live a life of love.

There's a little phrase buried in the middle of today's reading which reaffirms this. Did you catch it?
Down in verse 17:

As he is, so are we in this world...

The God who is love.
The God who lives love.
The God who freely shares love.
That's what he is.
And **that** is what we prayerfully seek to be in this world.

As he is, so are we in this world...

So..... what might God-imitating love
the love willing to enter our dismal human condition
the love willing to surrender all in suffering
the love willing to die
what might that God-imitating love look like?

A preaching professor once said to us, "You don't have to look any further than the pages of Scripture to find real life examples that either support or contrast biblical truths."

On this Mother's Day, then, we'll heed that prof's call.
Look at some of the mothers in the bible.
And what do you see?
God-love?
Or not?

The very first mother we read about is Eve, mother of all living.
Unfortunately, the account is tightly packed and doesn't tell us much about her inner life, or her interactions with husband and children. Only, in Genesis 4:1, the wonder she had at giving birth.
Which, in itself, already tells us at least something. Wonder at life. Valuing it. Marvelling in it.

God-inspired love sees the lives of other human beings with wonder, and value. It marvels at them and counts them significant.

The next mother of whom we read anything significant is Sarah.
Genesis 16 reveals the inner drive for children coming out in Sarah giving her servant Hagar to Abraham to be a surrogate mother. It erupts into conflict when she becomes pregnant and Sarah's self-preservation engages. Hagar is abused.
That sort of self-preservation is **not** God-love.
In chapter 21, Isaac is born. And Sarah laughs. There is joy in life. But again self-interest

bubbles to the surface and both Hagar and her son Ishmael are banished to the desert. Effectively, sent away to die.

Self-interest, the polar opposite of God's sacrificial love, destroys life instead of preserves it. It diminishes, rather than values life. It pushes away, rather than drawing near.

Then there is Sarah's daughter-in-law, Rebecca. Who also becomes a mother. She bears twins. However, says Genesis 25, she loved one more than the other. She played favorites. And the result was havoc - tension, running away, and hatred all began to fester.

How different that is, also, from God's love! Which doesn't look for the deserving or the strong or the beautiful. But comes to all sinners, freely and equally, richly and without reservation.

Lest we think all biblical mother references are negative, though, let's quickly move to the mother of Moses. We are never told her name. But this shadowy figure shows God-love at its best. When Pharaoh commanded that all baby boys be destroyed, she risked her own life to spare the life of her son. She sacrificed her own well-being to protect him, and nurture him. She was creative, as God-love so often is, in devising new ways to care for him by weaving together the little boat. And she was watchful, as God's love watches us, by placing her daughter as a sort of guardian angel at the river bank.

And then there is Pharaoh's daughter, who becomes Moses' step mom. She gathers Moses out of his mini-ark, recognizes him as a Hebrew baby and immediately adopts him. Can you imagine what her father said when she got home? Those of you who have ever tried to take a stray puppy home, and experienced your parents' rather strained response, can probably imagine.

"You brought home a **WHAT?** And you want to **WHAT?** In **MY** house?"

Welcoming in the stranger.

Compassion for the needy.

Protecting those that can't protect themselves.

Enlarging the borders of one's home.

That, from a gentile, as a great example of God-like love!

And, then, the mother-daughter relationship between Naomi and Ruth. A beautiful relationship of sacrifice and surrender of personal rights on both their parts. Reflecting God's sacrificial love.

Naomi, who had a legal right to demand the care of her daughters-in-law setting them free after their husbands died. Surrendering her chance at a future with some security from poverty and starvation. Doing that so that they might have a hope of a new and prosperous life.

Willing to become nothing, so that they would become something.

Sound Christ-like?

And Ruth - going with her mother in law to a strange land. Committed to the end. *Where you go, I will go. And where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people. And your God my God.*

Like God's call to his people, "*Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you.*"

Or the words of Jesus, "*Surely, I am with you ALWAYS.*"

The marvellous thing is that in their mutual surrender and sacrifice **BOTH** of them were blessed, and both found healing and restoration in their lives.

Let these women be illustrations to us that give us cause to pause, or serve as an inspiration to our prayerful desire to live a life of God-love in the world.

To flesh out what the apostle said:

As God is, so are we in this world. (v.17)

As God is.....

And with that one last Mother reference.

Have you ever done a search on passages that refer to God in motherly terms?

Isaiah 42 refers to God as being in labour, panting for the birth of a New Creation that is just and righteous.

In Isaiah 46 God continues promises to sustain and carry and rescue the one who has been born.

God will do so ALWAYS.... not like human moms, who as we have seen can have their failings. God, says Isaiah 49, will NEVER forget the child that is born.

Later, in chapter 66, God promises, "*As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.*"

Hosea also uses mothering images. In chapter 13 it is actually a mother-bear image, strong and powerful and defending and angry and fighting for the life of her cubs.

Yes, God-love is not always meek and mild.

In its remembering and caring and comforting it can **ALSO**:

be strong.

be angry.

stand up and hold its ground in the face of evil and attack.

May the Spirit of God, whose power raised our Lord Jesus from the dead, also raise up and birth such sacrificial, caring, impartial and yet determined love in our lives.

And may it be found to be a bold love.

Willing to risk.

Willing to try new things.

Without fear.

Which is how St. John ends the passage.

And where we'll end.

When we live in love here on earth, we won't always get it right.

Just like the mothers in the bible. Who didn't always get it right.

But knowing that doesn't paralyse us in fear.

Fear that God may condemn us. Or reject us because we screwed it up.

Friends, the love of God in Jesus Christ won't ever reject us.

Christ has been rejected and died in our place.

We are accepted.

Amazing grace.

And since he doesn't condemn, neither will we condemn each other when we take risks in love, and things don't fully work out as we had hoped or dreamed.

Right?

We step out.

And trust that God will, through our lifestyle of God-imitating, mother-like love, let our neighbors see lives that are unique.

And winsome.

To the glory of God -

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

AMEN.

