

TITLE: Abiding Love

DATE: 4.28.2024

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 4:7-21

TEXT: ¹⁶So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

THEME: God loving us to love others.

INTRODUCTION

Every culture, all over the world, has a word for 'love' in their language. There is love as part of their human interactions. The word 'love' communicates a deep affection for others. It pulls at the heart strings on all who have these same feelings and affection in their lives. We all love differently but universally we have love and can see it in others.

Love communicates empathy, fosters unity, is caring, breaks down barriers, respects, accepts, approvals, creates a sense of belonging, is life giving, is for all and finds its purpose in relationships. Love unites humanity across cultural and linguistic divides. 1 John gives us a description of the expansiveness of love and as a revelation of knowing God.

SCRIPTURE

The way we behave, love, care for others makes God visible to others. "¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us." Our love is good, not perfect. God's love is not limited to a people or location, but can be everywhere and for all people. Love is for relationships. It is in these loving relationships we can begin to have a sense of God with them. "¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit". This also means that God's Spirit begins to work in all of us, even before we come to believe. It could be our conscience, our instinct, that feeling that there is something more or simply God's initiative of loving us.

Our Love is good but not perfect and is ever improving. Like how we loved as a child with a pet, then a boyfriend or girlfriend, going steady, then marriage, with children and into old age. Our love matured, learned a few things. Was tempered with trust. Grew in scope. Endured when the circumstances changed and remained committed. God can be seen in how we care for others, by what we do, how we use our money, how our passions are ignited and our patience is held. Other dynamics of love can be seen in other settings, cultures, by different names, experiences, terms, traditions and relationships. There are people in every setting who have an insight of God because they love. ^{7c}everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

It is through love that we develop our understanding of God. Love is relational which makes us think about the atoning sacrifice in verse 10 more as forgiveness instead of a sacrificing payment of a debt of sin. Love sacrifices a debt of sin with forgiveness to heals a hurt.

When we use money to pay a debt of sin it is a financial transaction, but not relational. It is sacrificing what we have to set a prisoner free. Liberating them to do whatever they want with no strings attached. Love is relational and comes with strings attached. It frees for the purpose of being in relationships with each other. We forgive sin and debt so we can have a bond together. Love is deeply organic. God sending the Son to love and forgive binds us to God as family and to be loving. So for us to love others does not sacrifice what we have to bail out the incarcerated but rather we are to sacrifice our wounded hurts, by forgiving those who have imprisoned our ability to move beyond our injuries. The sacrifice of our hurt through forgiveness creates a bond of love. (Just as a side note; just because we forgive somebody, it doesn't mean we have to become best buddies. Some people are really toxic and we should stay away from them. All forgiveness means is that we don't want to hurt them like how they have hurt us and that they should pay for the consequences of their offenses.)

Love is relational with God and therefore transformational. We are forgiven with strings attached. Relational strings, Strings of care, strings of responsibility, strings of generosity, strings of forgiveness, strings of time and strings of peace. We are never released from the strings of being mindful of the welfare of others. This love takes away the fear of a punisher God and draws us towards a gracious God who dispenses grace, forgiveness and life in love.

APPLICATION

How does our relationship with God inform our relationship with others?

Sacrifice to bring blessing

Jesus unflinching insistence towards the divine mission to alleviate human suffering lead him to the cross in solidarity of our suffering. Acknowledging the wounds of other enables us to see the humanity in others and the image of God

Forgiveness is key,

Where there is hurt and we have a right to hurt other just as much, we forgive and gives up our right to hurt back. Pono so we can move on beyond our hurt.

Forgiveness is more powerful than reparations.

There are so many instances where colonialism has created atrocities that cannot be undone. Numerous futures have been erased. No amount of money could ever equal the injustices that they caused. Only forgiveness can bridge those wounds towards reconciliation, bring an end to an open wound and give love a chance to bring about a better future.

Good is Good Enough

This is how our love, matures, and becomes more good. I was watching episodes of Motor Trends Road Kill Garage bringing these old cars to life when David Freiburger used the term 'gooder.' Standing next to an old car, he brought back to life it was running rough. But with a few more replacement parts, some borrowed parts from other vehicles and modifications to bypass troubles he said he can make them 'gooder' but never perfect, just like our relationships in love.

When God tells you to, be bold to love others,

But when God's direction is not so clear, Temper your love with wisdom, maturity and experience. In our loneliness and kind heartedness, guard your heart, don't send money, you are not the only one the Nigerian prince is giving attention to.

CONCLUSION

Love informs us about God. Maybe that is why Former Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dali Lama have struck up a friendship. Desmond Tutu says, "...no faith, not even the Christian faith, can ever encompass God or even be able to communicate who God is. Only God can do that." There are things that we can learn about God and love from other people, cultures, faiths, traditions and practices.

If the missionaries understood Aloha as Agape love, I wonder how the mission might have taken a different trajectory? Maybe there could have been things that the missionary might have learned instead of thinking they had to do all of the teaching.

Yesterday I participated in an envisioning workshop at Pearl City Community Church on Oahu. Josh Hayashi our consultant asked me to share what we have been doing here at WUC with the Mission Ground Affordable Housing project. Primarily as an example of a church that is doing something 'new.' In the Small group I facilitated, there was a realization, in their struggle with an aging congregation and the absence of young people. They came to the conclusion to continue loving anyone who came to church. The 'new thing' will be for the Church to go out to love their neighbors instead of waiting for them to come to them. I didn't think of it, but if that's all we do until the end of us, then we would have done what we were supposed to do, whether people come or not. God's Spirit will always be there, with the next thing. Until then we will enrich lives with love, so we all can know God more.