



Sermon: May 16, 2021

Scripture Reading: First Letter of John 4: 7-21

The Message:
Limitless Love in a Littered World

[Video Version](#)



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When I think about love and ministry, complex vignettes appear in my mind from 46 years of involvement in the lives and loves of generations.

It all started with a sermon about love. They had been working together, he expanding his business. Why not hire the wife of his best friend to help organize his office? Then there was that sermon about love – and who better to express that love than the two of them to each other? They ran off together the first day their young, twenty-something minister arrived. For a week. God worked through lay leaders in the church, and that green, naive minister to right the wrong as much as possible. He went back to his wife; she back to her two small boys and temporarily to her husband. Within four months, the abandoned husband forgave his best friend in church on Christmas Eve.

Mom went to another province for a high school reunion. She went for five days and stayed for three years. Another member of the church became a grandma to the children. A university student the kids loved from Sunday school accompanied the family on a planned for cruise to support the kids. Dad tested his decisions with his minister. He took a demotion to work close to home, paid her bills and treated her well, making every decision on the basis of what was best for his children. He paid her to look after their children when she returned, a penniless Prodigal mother. And the children thrived.

Husband cheats on wife with many others. Finally wife asks him to choose: her or the other women. He chooses them. Years go by and he is diagnosed with terminal cancer. The 'others' don't seem to want the burden of care. Exwife takes him into her home and cares for him. While he is dying, she worries about his relationship with his children and with God. A now more experienced minister is summoned to his bedside to help him to reach out to God, and his children for forgiveness. And on the way he finds faith and peace.

There are the simpler stories of love: weddings I've done that have lasted forever; members finding love after loss; life long friendships that start in the children's choir, love that blossoms in Confirmation class that is tested and found strong years later; a love that produces 7 children, 17 grandchildren, 19 great grandchildren and 2 great great grandchildren.

When a minister of my age talks about love, it's not sentimental, naive, unknowing. I once started a Valentine's Day sermon by saying, "Love at first sight isn't the miracle. Love after fifty years, that's the miracle!" And to my surprise, people cheered!

So friends, believe me when I say that all love comes from God. The writer of the first letter of John is right: God's love is the basic, essential fact of our faith. Because the love that I've seen -- it couldn't happen on its own. There are too many temptations, too many human flaws in each of us to make loving relationships clear sailing.

John has it right: love is passion expressed in action, made real for us by God sending Jesus to express God's life-giving love in the context of messy human relationships. And it is a love that we don't have to earn, to measure up to, to deserve. We get it given to us freely.

John insists that the more completely we know God, the more the immense reality of God's love dawns on us. Nothing in us is so broken that God is unable to embrace us as we are, love us as we are. There is no punishment in this love of God's, so no reason to be afraid.

Such a love is impossible to keep to ourselves and so God's love overflows from us to touch the lives of others. Such love can never originate with us. It is not our own, weak, limited love that we share with God's beloved. As we see ourselves as God's beloved, as God's love spills out of us, so too we see our sisters and brothers, no matter how different they seem from us, as part of God's beloved community.

Shakespeare gets it right when he puts these words in Silvius' mouth in *As You Like It*:

What 'Tis to Love:

It means being full of sighs and tears,
It is to be all made of faith and service,
It is to be all made of fantasy,
All made of passion and all made of wishes,
All adoration, duty, and observance,
All humbleness, all patience and impatience,
All purity, all trial, all observance,
And so am I for Phoebe.

Jesus said, 'And so am I for the world.' 'And so am I for you.'

When God's unimaginable, limitless love comes alive in us, we become the real presence of God in the world. All we can possibly say to such love is thank you, and may it indeed be so.