

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: 1 John 3:16–24**

**Sermon: “Love One Another”**

This the Fourth Sunday of Easter is Good Shepherd Sunday.

Today we reflect on how the Holy Spirit continues to direct the

Church to ***“hear the voice of our Shepherd”*** as we live in this

***“valley of the shadow of death.”*** In Jesus, our Good Shepherd, we

know what true love is, for he lays down his life for us, his sheep.

As our Good Shepherd leads us to our eternal home, we love one

another as he first loved us (1 John 3:23: 4:19). Through the love

of the Church and the Word that she confesses, the Spirit calls

others in this lost world to hear the Good Shepherd’s voice (John

10:16).

**Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

“By this we know love.” Those words hopefully make your ears perk up. Love. Isn’t it what we all want? Isn’t it what we all need?

If our text today has the formula for love, we want to hear it!

So, what does it say? From God's Word to us through the apostle John, what do we know about love?

Believe it or not, in one way or another, everybody loves. Even the worst people in history loved. But here is the thing: on our own, most of the time the object of our love is self. When we love something, it is generally because it brings us pleasure. When we hate someone or something, it is generally because it is a threat to us. But is love of self really love at all?

The apostle John writes in verses just before our text, ***“For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous”*** (3:11–12).

Cain loved, but the object of his love was himself. His brother received recognition from God, and out of jealousy and love of self, Cain slew his brother.

His love of self showed itself as hate toward Abel. The message that we heard from the beginning is that we should love one another . . . but we don't.

Another example of failed human love is in Jesus' description of the religious leaders of his day. Their true love was not directed to those God had given them to care for, but rather their love was directed toward themselves. Jesus taught, ***“He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep”*** (John 10:12–13).

Remember, ***“This is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another”*** (1 John 3:11). But we don't.

The Law proves over and over again that we are more like Cain and the hired hands than we would like to admit.

And if we're honest, what did love of self do for Cain and the false teachers? It led Cain to a fear of God that saw no hope, and it led to his lonely exile and rejection from others. Where did it lead the religious leaders of whom Jesus spoke? It led them to fear enemies and to actions for the sake of self-preservation. Their love of self also led to fear of God, without hope, and to self-imposed exile.

Love of self really does no good for anyone, not even for us. We need something other than the love of self.

The message of Easter reveals a different kind of love. It is a love that has "the other" as the object of its affection. It is a love that lays down one's life for the sake of the other. It is a love that is confident and unafraid because it lacks nothing. It is not motivated by fear of loss, but rather it recognizes that it has received everything, and so it freely gives.

Contrasting self-love with the love that we learn from God, John writes, ***“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us”*** (v 16). This is truly something when we think about it. People tell us that we have to earn their respect. We understand that we have to earn a paycheck. When people tell us that they love us, it is often followed by “because,” and that word is usually accompanied by something we did. For example, “I love you because you are always there for me.” Or, “I love you because you are such a good friend.” This is not wrong, and when we hear words like that, we feel good that we brought something good to someone else’s life.

But John is not talking about a love that we have earned. Did we deserve to have God lay down his life for us? No. The love that God has made known is far different from any other love.

***“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak . . . Christ died for the ungodly. . . . God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . . . While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son”***

(Romans 5:5–6, 8, 10). That is love.

And Jesus gives this love willingly. He says, ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. . . . I am the good shepherd. . . . I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again”*** (John 10:11, 14, 15, 18). Jesus laid down his life and took it up again for us. This is the message of Easter: “By this we know love.”

We receive and know this love every time we gather around our Good Shepherd in the Word and Sacrament.

Jesus says, **“Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. . . .**

**Drink; this is my blood which is shed for you.”** Here Jesus gives you his love; here is where you receive it. His love, which was first **“poured out on us richly”** in our Baptism (Titus 3:6), continues to be received by us in his Supper. Moreover, in the absolution, he unflinchingly reveals to us that his love has covered even the sins that bring us guilt and shame. And by his same love, that guilt and shame is removed. All of this is made possible because he laid down his life for the sheep and took it up again. Lent and Easter get at the heart of how we know love.

John lets us know that this love cannot be contained by those who receive it. If a person receives Jesus’ love, he must love others. David put it this way: **“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows”** (Psalm 23:5).

We can say, “You prepare for me the table at your Supper, and you have anointed my head with the water of Baptism, and your love for me cannot help but overflow.”

This does not mean that we will be sinless. We will continue to battle with sin as long as we live upon this earth. We are all poor miserable sinners who need Jesus. We can not look to our own actions to assure ourselves that we are going to heaven. Only when we realize that we fail in the true love department and return to God’s love in Christ do we begin to understand what love is. For that is where we know love and that is where we find the source of our love for others.

It is because Jesus laid down his life for us that we have the ability to lay down our lives for others.

In verse 23 of our text, John wrote, ***“And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.”***

As Lutherans, we have always understood that obedience to God's commandments begins with the Father's love for us in Jesus. Jesus united us to himself in Baptism and thereby connected us with the greatest act of love the universe has ever known, Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sin (Romans 6:3–4).

Moreover, Jesus continues to grant us this same love in his Supper. And upon receiving the Supper, we often pray, ***“We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another”*** (LSB, p 166).

We understand that ***“we should love one another,”*** and in the prayer after the Lord's Supper, we recognize that the source of our love for others and faith toward God begins with knowing Jesus' love for us. ***“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us”*** (1 John 3:16). Amen