God’s Gift of Love in Jesus Christ

1 John 4:7-14

 Today is the fourth Sunday of advent as we prepare for the coming of the Christ child. The theme for today is love, therefore we will be discussing how God showed His love to the world by sending Jesus Christ to be the Savior. Not only is God love, but He has called us to love others just like He has loved us. Our goal today is to understand what sacrificial love really is, how God showed us this type of love through Jesus Christ and finally what we are called to do as followers of Him.

 As we begin today let us read together the passage of Scripture taken from the First Epistle of the Apostle John chapter 4 verses 7-14: **7 Beloved, let’s love one another; for love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 By this the love of God was revealed in us, that God has sent His only Son into the world so that we may live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God remains in us, and His love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we remain in Him and He in us, because He has given to us of His Spirit. 14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.**

 Before we begin to unwrap the Apostle’s teaching about love we first need to understand what kind of love John is referring to in this passage. The love John is speaking of in Greek is referred to as the love that exists between God the Father and His creation. This is called agape love because this refers to love that is unconditional and sacrificial. When someone shows this kind of love to someone else it is not because of anything the other has done to earn it, this love exists because the one showing the love has chosen to show it. This is the way that God loves His creation. As we begin in verse 7 John first says that we need to show love for each other because love is from God. If we say that we have a place with God, then we must show love to others. This verse confirms the teaching that is found all through the pages of Scripture that God is love and that mankind only knows how to love because God showed love to mankind first. What we learn is that God is the author of love because He created it and showed it to His creation from the very beginning of time. Therefore, when we come to know God and are changed by Him when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, the new man is created, and the old man dies. This is what the Apostle Paul discussed when he presented the church in Galatia with the teaching regarding the fruits of the Spirit. When we were sharing these with the children last summer our first lesson was regarding love, since that is the first fruit Paul discusses in that passage. We learn how to love like God loves when His Spirit enters us creating a new nature in us. When we love each other like God loves us we show others that our love is genuine because we are loving others as God has first loved us. The first point we must take away from the passage today is that we must love each other because we are of God who has shown His great love by sending His Son Jesus Christ to redeem us from our sins.

 Continuing in verse 8 we are shown the opposite argument regarding love. The Apostle John tells his readers that those who do not love others do not know God because God is love. This verse is one of those teachings in Scripture that is sometimes a challenge to explain and understand. I would like for you to think of a time in your life when you showed love to someone whom you felt was very difficult to love. As you think about that situation, I would like you to think about why that person was so difficult to love. Many times, when we have an interaction with someone like this, we struggle to love them because no matter what we do for them, they never return to us the love that we are sharing. I do have to admit that it is very hard because all of us want to be accepted and loved by others. The challenge is that we deep down want to be acknowledged for the love we are sharing and are hoping that it will be returned to us. When we become frustrated about this, we need to think about how our God has had to face this situation so many times. In Apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Rome he makes a very powerful point regarding love that will help to encourage us when we are getting tired of showing love without having it returned to us. In Romans 5:8 Paul writes **“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** The point that Paul is making is that God showed us love while we were still in sin and had no desire to show any love to Him. When Jesus Christ began His ministry, He was rejected because He spoke openly regarding the sin and rebellion towards God that was taking over the culture. The Son of God came to earth, Emmanual, and even though He is God He was rejected and persecuted. Even though He faced such rejection Jesus never stopped showing love to others and He even faced death with love in His heart rather than anger and revenge. What we learn in verse 8 is that real love is shown to others even when we are persecuted and rejected because of our faith. We cannot allow the rejection of the gospel to make us become angry at others and seek for them to be hurt or rejected by God. We must remember that when someone rejects the good news of the gospel it is not us, they are rejecting, they are rejecting God. Let us by followers of God who show love to others regardless of how they treat us. This follows the example of Jesus and glorifies God who is love and shows it to all evenly.

 John continues in verse 9 by telling his readers that God sending Jesus Christ to this world is the epitome of love. He revealed His love for His creation because He sent Hs one and only Son to purchase salvation for all who trust in Him. What we begin to see in this verse is the manifestation of God’s unconditional love for His creation. The concept of grace is what we see being discussed here. Other than the desire of God to offer a solution to the problem of sin that was separating us from Him, what other reason would there be for Him to send His Son to this fallen world? I would argue that there is no other reason to do this except for the grace of God. There is nothing that you and I can do to earn the favor of God, nor is there any reason why God should show this love to us based upon our own merits. God sent His Son to this world because He loved this world and wanted to save it through the atoning sacrifice of His Son. This is at the heart of the teaching that Jesus shared with Nicodemus in John 3:16. The coming of the Christ child happened because it was God’s will, and He sent Him because of His desire to save mankind from their sins. Rather than us trying to earn God’s favor by our deeds, our God saved us even though we could do nothing to earn such favor. This is the love of God shown in His nature and in His very actions.

 Verse 10 expands on this concept by making the point that God is not only love, but through His actions He has shown His love for His creation when He sent Jesus Christ to earth. What this shows us is that love is not just a feeling or a thought that we have in our minds. Love must be expressed through the way we treat others and in the daily actions we take as followers of Christ. If we look closely at the world around us, we see so many people that are hurting. They are hurting because they want to be loved and for someone to take an interest in them. Many of the behaviors we see people engaging in are taking place because the person is looking for acceptance from others. The search for love sometimes is takes people to embracing lifestyles that are unhealthy, when people use sex to be accepted and when people try to change their God-given gender so that they can be embraced by the culture. The problem with this view towards love is that the person is trying to get others to love them by taking actions to be accepted This is not the way that God shows His love to us. God does not love us because we have earned His love or done something to make us acceptable to Him. John tells us that God’s very nature is love, so it is not because of us that He has accepted us. He loves us because we have been made in His image, and He has chosen to love us.

 John tells us in verse 11 that we need to show love to others because God loved us first and sent His Son to redeem us. This concept of love and why followers of Christ need to show it makes Christianity very different from any other religion that has been created by man. As we were discussing the Epistle of James, we learned that man cannot be saved by his own deeds, and that man cannot earn the favor of God by performing good works. We perform good works in this world because those actions show that our faith in God is real. Jesus said several times that a tree is known by its fruit, meaning that when a tree is judged for being fruitful, we come to that conclusion by how much fruit it bears. When others see us what do they see? Do they see a church that loves each other, or do they see a group of Christians who spend their time arguing and dividing over small differences? We as the church have such an important role to play in our ministry and when we share love with others the fruit, we bear shows others that the God we serve is love and they will want to become more connected with Him through us.

 Verse 12 is very powerful and is a great answer to a question that many non-believers in God ask. There are comments made that if God would just appear and make Himself known in person it would be much easier for people to believe that He exists. John is making the point that God is not able to be seen by human eyes, but when His people act in love towards others, they become the physical evidence of God in the world. This reminds me of a line in a song I heard many years ago by a Christian rock band that I listen to. The point of the song is to remind followers of Christ that their daily actions are important because when others see those actions, they see Jesus in them. The chorus of the song includes these words “The only Jesus they’ll ever see is the one in you and me, the only Jesus they will know is the one that lives inside our souls.” I really like that message because when people see the things followers of Christ do in His name it deeply impacts their vision of what Jesu is. In John 13:35 Jesus tells the disciples that they continue to love one another the world will know that they are His disciples. Those words still ring true today, when the world sees how we love one another they will conclude that we really are followers of Christ.

 Next in verse 13 John says that we can know that God the Spirit is in us if we love each other as God loves us. This is a very important concept for us to take to heart as followers of Christ. The transformation that takes place in a person’s life when they become a follower of Christ is life-changing and will redirect that person for the rest of their life. No longer is the primary function of that person to live for their own agenda or to seek things that they think will bring them joy in this life. The Apostle Paul in his second epistle to the church in Corinth informs his readers that when they become followers of Christ it will make them an entirely new creation. **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (5:17).** Therefore, John and Paul are teaching us that the love of God, when it enters our hearts, will totally change the kind of person we are. We are now driven by the Spirit of love rather than the depraved mind which seeks glory for the self.

 As we conclude looking at verse 14 John repeats his earlier claim in this epistle by reminding his readers that everything, he is telling his readers comes from his first-hand experience with Jesus when He was doing His earthly ministry. John wants us to know that the Savior of the world is Jesus and that everything He has promised to those who follow Him will come to pass. This then brings us back to the stable and the manger in Bethlehem. God sent His Son to this world to be its Savior meaning that the bondage mankind has to sin has been eliminated and we can now have the blessed assurance that we are in a right relationship with God. We must remember that the arrival of Christ was God’s love message telling His creation that He loves it so much that He was willing to allow His perfect and holy Son to be sacrificed to make things right again. The Apostle Peter in his first public sermon tells his listeners that there is no other name under heaven given to man that can save them. Salvation is available through Jesus Christ alone! Therefore, the evidence John speaks of combined with the testimony of the eyewitnesses assures us that everything Jesus Christ said of Himself is true and we can trust Him for our eternal salvation.

 Before we end our time together today let us quickly discuss what all of this means for us today. The first point I would like to review with you is that God is love. We know this about God because He first reached out to us by sending His Son to us. This act of love gives us the example we need to follow in our own lives. May we be willing to give of ourselves to share the good news with those who need to hear it. God gave of Himself to redeem us, should we not do the same for those around us?

 The second point we need to take from this passage today is that we need to share the good news of the gospel with others regardless of who they are or what they may think of us. John tells us that God showed His love to us way before we could ever show that back to Him. Therefore, when others may reject the good news, we cannot stop sharing it with them. We serve a God who loves all people even though many of His creation rebel against Him continuously. Showing the love of God to others many times means that we must be willing to tell them the truth even if that may offend or upset them. We must be willing to offend or we will impair their ability to be restored with God.

 Finally, let us remember that every word we say and action we take in the name of Christ has consequences. The world will know whether we are really followers of Christ by the way we treat others. If we really love others then we will not hesitate to share our faith with them. If we refuse to share it with them then we are showing them that we do not love them. Knowing the truth and refusing to share it is very hateful. We cannot refuse to tell everyone that Jesus Christ coming as a baby is the greatest gift ever because He gave us something we do not deserve and also something that we can never repay. Such love is only available from God through Jesus Christ. May we share this with others in our words, actions and in how we pray for them.