

Sermon: April 26, 2009
Scripture: Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John: 3:1-10
Title: "How Great The Love"

Call to Worship:

Answer us when we call, O God
Be gracious to us and hear our prayers.

O sons and daughters, how long will "My" honor become a reproach?
How long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception?

Many are saying: Who will show us any good?
Lift up the light of Thy countenance upon us, O Lord!

Thou hast put gladness in our hearts
More than when the grain and wine abound.

In peace we will both lie down and sleep.

For Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety.

Hymns:

- #376 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
- #367 Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love
- #384 O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go

Prayer of Confession:

Eternal Lord, You have loved us beyond our wildest dreams. When we were unlovable, You continued to love us. When we have been hateful toward others, You have not withdrawn Your love from us. Day in and day out we have experienced the outpouring of Your love through the created order and the bounty of the earth. Even when the vicissitudes of life confront us, we have found comfort in Your ever present love. Forgive us for the opportunities we missed to love others, and for the times when our interaction with others communicated everything except love. Teach us that loving others is a choice which we make just as Christ chose to demonstrate His love on the Cross. We pray in His name. Amen.

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"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called The Children of God...."

1 John 3:1

I try in my own mind to grasp the enormity of the Love which God has bestowed on me. It is almost impossible to grasp. I mean, when I examine my life, my birth into a loving and caring home, opportunities for education, loving and caring people in the congregations I have pastured for over 40 years, a wife and family that loves and forgives me on a daily basis, the advent of grandchildren into my life. You know, grandchildren don't care about your short comings, they just love you because you are their PopPop. And I know that the love of grandchildren is reflective of the love which God has poured out on me. So, when I ponder the depth of God's Love, it is almost impossible to comprehend.

And what makes this Godly outpouring of love so incomprehensible is that I know that there are aspects of my life that do not reflect the Love, Peace and Justice which God calls upon all his children to exhibit. I'm not going to go into details. We don't have that much time, and you don't need to be burdened with my "confession." Suffice it to say that God's Love and Grace is made all the

more magnificent when I contemplate my own life and the thoughts and feelings that percolate through me.

How has it been with you? Has life been this same kind of struggle? One minute you are walking in the footsteps of Jesus and the next you are off on a tangent of your own? I believe that a true follower of Jesus lives in this tension between sinfulness and righteousness. And I worry about those who proclaim themselves to be righteous and pure, because even that proclamation is out of step with the humility and service which Christ modeled for us.

John must have known something of this struggle in his own life. Here was a man of tremendous power, a fisherman who left the nets to follow Jesus. Indeed we are told that this is the disciple whom Jesus loved. The bond between John and his cousin Jesus was great, but it did not keep him from letting his emotion all hang out. He often became agitated and boisterous. He became an important part of the development of the early Church, writing his own biography of Jesus, three short letters to the churches of Asia Minor. However, his zeal often got him in trouble with the authorities and at last got him exiled to the island of Patmos where he wrote the Book of Revelation.

Who better to share with us the reality of God's Love. And that reality is clearly that we are in the process of becoming like Jesus. I seriously doubt if we will ever be completely like Jesus. Perhaps there have been some who have emulated Christ's life style, but not his complete life. For many years Mother Teresa was put on a pedistal

because of her complete dedication to the people of the slums of India. But after her death her memoirs disclosed that she often got angry with God and often questioned God's providence.

John writes: Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

Do you know how comforting that is to me. John knew that he was a child of God. But John also knew that the final chapter of his life had not been written yet and that it remained to be seen what he, John, would become. Thank God that the final chapter has not been written on you and me. We are still in process. God is still working things out in our lives. We are still struggling between a life that reflects Christ's Life and a life that is more determined by the ways of the world. And it is a daily struggle for most of us.

John uses simple words to describe this struggle we are all involved in. John thinks in terms of purity and sin. These are concepts we still understand in this day. Absolute purity is a goal toward which folks strive. Absolute sin is a pit into which we can fall if we do not contend on a daily basis to strive for purity. Can someone be absolutely pure? Probably not! Can someone be absolutely debased and sinful. We'd like to think not, but in reality we remember the two young boys who fired into classrooms at Columbine High School ten years ago. We remember a

bomb that took the lives of 27 children at the day care center in the Federal Office Building in Oklahoma. And we remember the shots that killed and maimed students at VPI two years ago.

So, we know that we too could gravitate into that pit. The old adage: There but for the grace of God, go I. Rings true in our hearts and minds.

So, what keeps us out of the pit? What keeps our daily tension between good and evil from tanking out on the evil side? John tells us:

And we know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whoever abideth in him sinneth not; who ever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

Life is not a matter of hard fast absolutes. We live in a world in tension. The world of politics. The world of economics. The world of international intrigue. The world of family life and social interaction. In each of these there is the opportunity to choose the direction we wish to take in life.

Christ made it possible for you and me to choose truth over evil. Christ's life, death and resurrection provides you and me the power we need to make ethical choices. Christ came to save sinners like you and me, because without Christ in our lives we would gravitate toward the worst that this world has to offer. Even with Christ in our lives it is a

struggle. You know it is! Christ is the one bright light in the world that lets you and me know that it is possible to triumph over evil and death. Therefore, we struggle with good and evil, knowing that God is not finished with us yet. God must have immense patience! In Christ the struggle goes on with the final result being that we will be triumphant. Without Christ there really is no struggle.

Where are you in your struggles?

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