

Experiencing God – Experiencing Love

I John 4:7-21

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If you were going to choose a word to try and sum up the nature of God what would you choose? Through the centuries humankind has come up with many answers: Truth, Beauty, Justice, Unmoved Mover, Omnipotent, Omniscient, energy, Creator, Sustainer, etc. God is many, if not all of these, but the word that the I John uses is “LOVE.” Love is God’s primary characteristic. All of the other attributes of God fit into this overarching quality. “God is love.”

Before we go much further we need to pause for a moment and make it clear what I John is NOT saying. He is not saying, “love is God.” We cannot substitute the word love for God. God is much more than the love we can express or experience from others.

Here is an example of what I am talking about. We can say, “a house is wood” but we cannot accurately say, “Wood is a house.” We can say that the nature of a house is wood, as opposed to brick, or aluminum siding, etc. We cannot say wood is a house, not unless you are a termite!

I John makes an amazing claim, “**...love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.**” (I John 4:7) It may be possible to say that there is sense in which all expressions of love are rooted in God whose essential nature is love. I John would probably not go that far. If this were the case then Buddhists, Muslims, Hindu’s, etc., even people of no faith, can experience God when they experience love or express love. I have to admit I find this to be a tempting idea and there may be some truth in it, even if I John would not go that far.

What I John does want to say is that, for us as Christians, the ultimate example of God's love for us can be found in the life of Jesus the Christ, which leads ultimately to his sacrificial life and eventual death on a cross. **“God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”** (I John 4:9-10) True love involves a willingness to sacrifice for the good of another.

True love is not found in mere feelings. Feelings are nebulous and often temporary. They tend to dissipate as the going gets tough. True love has staying power and it is not dependent on what it receives from the one who is loved. The marriage vows express this kind of love, “For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.” Human beings can and do live up to these vows; but sadly they often fail to live up to these vows. This is not the case with God. God's love has eternal staying power. Even when we sin and turn our back on God, God is ready to forgive and continues to love us.

Human beings are fallible, some more than others, and often fail to live up to the call to truly love those around us, sometimes even our own family members, let alone our neighbors and strangers. When we do experience or express a true sacrificial love we emulate God's sacrificial love for us in Jesus the Christ. When we experience or express sacrificial love we have a path to gaining insight into God's love for us in Jesus the Christ.

Today is Mother's Day. On this day we remember and give thanks for the love we experienced from our Mothers, both those who gave us birth and those who acted in a true “motherly” ways in our lives. Did you experience the sacrificial love of a mother in your life? I would like to take some time

now to give you a chance to share any stories of sacrificial love that you experienced. (congregation shares stories)

Our passage from I John's main focus of our passage from I John is our response to sacrificial love. It not only provides a pathway to experiencing the nature of God it also calls forth a response from us. We too are "moved" to love others sacrificially, not only our immediate family, but our neighbors, even strangers. So the question for us today is "Has our mother's love for us made us more loving people?" If so give thanks. You have been blessed and are a blessing. Now here is an even more critical question, "Has God's love for us made us more loving people?" If so give thanks. You have been blessed and are a blessing.

As I John says, "**God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.**" (I John 4:16b) Amen.