

Rev. Dr. Niveen Sarras
1 John 3:16-24
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What is love? How do you know that you are loved, or you love and care about somebody?

According to Oxford dictionary, love is “A feeling or disposition of deep affection or fondness for someone...Senses relating to affection and attachment.”ⁱ The apostle John talks about a different kind of love. He talks about Agape, the divine love that involves goodwill, benevolence, and faithfulness. The agape love is revealed to us through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. John in his gospel describes Jesus as the Good Shepherd who revealed the deepest meaning of love when he laid his life for his sheep (John 10:11). This is the kind of divine love that we are called to express to one another.

John encourages his community to love one another while they were facing a difficult time. John’s community was divided into two groups. The first group left the church convinced of their own teaching. John calls this group “antichrists” (1 John 2:18-25; 4:3). The second group remained in the church and struggled “with issues of identity: how could they tell whom to trust?”ⁱⁱ To trust the apostle John or the group who left the church. It seems that John’s church experienced a high level of anxiety. John tries to calm down their anxiety by reminding them of their true identity as children of God (v.1) and their connection with divine love.

Division and disagreement happen in any congregation.. Like the first group who left John's church over a theological dispute with John and his followers. According to John, the solution to this problem is to remind ourselves of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who loves us and laid himself for us. It seems that John is telling us at the moment that we have a disagreement in our

church or at home, it is the moment when we need to approach disagreement with agape love. Jesus our Good Shepherd, “reveals to the world God’s love by living the way God desires: namely, by loving others ‘to completion’ or ‘to perfection’ in his decision to ‘lay down his life’ on behalf of others.”ⁱⁱⁱ My friends we are called to imitate the example of Jesus as we live out our own lives as children of God. When we are anxious about our identity and about our ministries or when we have a disagreement, let us remind ourselves of Jesus’ agape love.

We cannot love one another by our own will and strength. It is easy to express our agape love when everything is fine in our church, or home, or workplace. But the real challenge is to show agape love when we face a problem or when we have an issue with one another. For this reason and more, John tells his children, his church, that they need to obey God’s commandment: they should believe in the name of Jesus Christ and love one another. John does not separate faith from love. We need to have faith in Jesus Christ to be able to agape one another. Our faith in Christ helps us to love each other. Jesus our Good Shepherd guides us to solve any misunderstanding and conflict between us.

Divine love is not a word we say to each other. John teaches his church that agape love should not be in words but in action. John makes it clear that loving one another is demonstrated in taking care of the poor in our community. Life-giving will be lived out not in risking our lives for one another but for taking care of the poor.

As a church family, we are called to attend to one another. Jesus' love was kind when he fed the hungry and advocated for them and tough when he held the religious leaders accountable. He fed the hungry and held other accountable. As a church family, we are called to solve any conflict by confronting one another with grace. I hope that when we experience conflict in our church, we will be prepared to deal with it in the spirit of agape love that honors God and strengthens our church family.

Agape love does not depend on how we feel or how others feel about us. Your vocation and mine is to love one another as Jesus loves us. His love empowers us to seek the well-being of every church member. So, when one of us has a problem with a member of our church family, let us try our best to iron out the problem through communication and love. Agape love invites us to restore broken relationships before we fix any conflict in our church.

Finally, John assures his church that abiding in Jesus Christ helps them to love one another and to forgive one another. We will always experience disagreement within our church family. We might fail each other. But we will always be children of God and have this divine connection between us. Forgiveness is a sign of agape living in you and me. John affirms that God forgives us our sins. John also confirms that those who feel guilty should not be hard on themselves because God will always forgive them. "Even when we would condemn ourselves, God's grace is larger than our sin, and God's mercy is greater than our ability to grasp it."^{iv} Repent and God will forgive you. Our divine connection with God gives us boldness to approach God to ask for help. God will not put you to shame because you are a child of God. We are called to imitate our Shepherd Jesus by forgiving one another and love one another. Our ILC will close if we stop

loving one another as Jesus loves us. Believing in the name of Jesus Christ and love one another is pleasing to God and help us to be united in difficult times.

ⁱ <http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/110566>

ⁱⁱ Alicia Myers, "Commentary on1 John 3: 16-24," *Workingpreacher*, accessed on April 20, 2018

ⁱⁱⁱ Alicia Myers, "Commentary on1 John 3: 16-24," *Workingpreacher*, accessed on April 20, 2018

^{iv} Brian Peterson, "Commentary on1 John 3: 16-24," *Workingpreacher*, accessed on April 20, 2018