

**“In Truth and Action”
1 John 3:16-24**

INTRODUCTION:

This morning, we step into the oft misunderstood topic of “love.”

**We are Christians – followers of Jesus Christ;
our faith is founded on the concept of “love”
yet we get a little uncomfortable talking about “love.”**

Well, that’s exactly what we are going to talk about today.

**I may not be able to give you clear concise answers
to the questions raised here today,
but I can at least raise the questions
and set you on the path
to discovering your own answers.**

**Jesus said, the world will know we are Christians
by our love for one another.**

Let’s examine the “truth” behind that statement.

THE TRUTH:

In verse 13 of our scripture today, we read:

**“Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world
hates you.”**

What does the writer mean by “the world hating Christians?”

**While it is true that believers are hated in some other countries,
it is also true that when the community of faith
acts to expose greed, avarice, hatred and evil in the world,
there is a backlash against the believers.**

**When the church adopts the premise of “love”
and acts on that premise,
invariably it will run afoul of those who are self-centered.
Or those with opposing agendas.**

**You have seen that in the recent political history in Eureka Springs.
When we, as a church, decided to embrace all Christians,
there were – and are – those who hate us for that stance.**

**The radical love Jesus had for sinners
and His willingness to include them in His life
ultimately led to His death.**

**Even from the Cross,
He was able to ask God to forgive those who were killing Him.**

**If we profess to follow Jesus,
then we need to be moving along the path
to becoming more loving – and forgiving – people.**

**Let me clear up one misconception,
If we are loving, that is no assurance of our salvation,
for non-believers are as capable of love as believers.
Love, however, can be evidence of our faith.**

**We love *because* we have been forgiven;
we are not forgiven because we are loving.**

**It is only when we begin to grasp the love by which we are grasped
that we can begin to live a life that is centered in love.**

And that translates to our treatment of others.

In verse 15, the writer states:

“Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.”

**This statement mirrors what Jesus said,
that to hate someone is equal to murdering that person.**

**You see, when someone is murdered,
they are cut off from the covenant community.**

**When we hate someone in our hearts,
despise them, cut them off from our relationship,
murder is just the fulfillment
of what we already harbor in our hearts.**

**It is clear that Jesus is asking us to respond to others
with love and forgiveness.
Not an easy task, is it?**

**So, then we come to the very heart of the passage – verse 16:
“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his
life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers
and sisters.’**

**This is simply a restatement of what Jesus said:
“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.
Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for
one’s friends.”**

**And that, my friends, is the goal of each of us
and the point of today’s sermon.**

ACTION:

**I know I joke around a lot by saying I don’t like people.
I hope you don’t take me too seriously when I say that.**

**As a matter of fact,
I can say without qualification that I love each of you.
Just not quite enough to lay my life down for you!**

**Would I run into a burning building to save you?
Well, I might *walk* into the building.**

**Would I jump into a raging river to save you?
Probably. I'm a pretty good swimmer.**

**Would I die the death of a sinner in *your* place?
Most likely not.
They are *your* sins; YOU pay for them!**

Are you familiar with the *Cotton Patch Gospels*?

***The Cotton Patch Gospel*, is an interpretation of the stories of Jesus
and the letters of the New Testament
into the language and culture
of the mid-20TH century South.**

**The Cotton Patch version of 1 John 3:18 it says:
My little ones, let's not *talk* about love. Let's not *sing* about
love. Let's put love into *action* and make it real!**

**And this is the point where putting love into action –
- moving from talking *about* love to demonstrating love –
gets uncomfortable.**

**First of all,
we are to be loving, tolerant and forgiving of each other.**

**A church must not be stifled by bitterness or self-interest,
but galvanized for compassion towards others.**

**We are doing a pretty good job of that
under the direction and guidance of the session.
Could we do better?
Certainly!
And we will, with God's help.**

We are asked to go beyond what our mission statement proposes.

**This scripture encourages us to look at the violence in our world –
the senseless and indifferent taking of innocent lives –
- to see the lack of love that makes such action possible.
And then to take action to lessen it.**

**This scripture encourages us to recognize our “neighbor”
and to treat them with charity and generosity.**

**What this scripture says – in no uncertain terms –
is that “those lacking life's basic necessities
should be paid for by those with means of livelihood.”**

**That's a direct quote from C. Clifton Black,
Professor of New Testament at Perkins School of Theology - SMU
in his article in the *New Interpreter's Bible* commentary.**

**Trust me when I tell you this:
Even though that sounds like a plank
out of Bernie Sanders campaign for the presidency,
it comes directly from Jesus and is not political!**

**I don't like it, it makes me uncomfortable,
and I wish I had never heard it.
But there it is.**

If we are to be the loving community God calls us to be,

**then part of what we do – putting love into action –
- must be providing for the poor.**

**I don't care how conservative you may be –
you *can't* rationalize your way out of God's call
to care for those who cannot care for themselves.**

And . . .

**I don't care how liberal you may be –
you *can't* live out this instruction on your *own*.
You can't do it without God's help.**

**The kind of love we are called to demonstrate
is not self-generated.
It is God's love that flows through us – the church.**

That kind of love is perfectly reflected in our mission statement.

**During the miles and hours between here and DFW
I heard a discussion on the radio concerning welfare.**

**The discussion started by the commentator saying that he thought
food stamps should only be used to purchase nutritious food.
Snack food, alcohol, tobacco, soft drinks, chips, etc.
should not be purchased with food stamps.**

**As you can imagine,
that sparked quite a discussion.
And it started me thinking:**

**As a faithful Christians –
called to love others – and to serve others –
but how do we distinguish between “wants” and “needs”?**

**Late one evening,
I was in a grocery store picking up a few grocery items.**

**I happened to end up in the check-out line
behind a woman with two school-aged kids.
Along with milk, bread, and other items
there were a lot of snacks.**

**When it came time for her to check out,
she paid for her groceries – snacks and all – with food stamps.**

**My first thought was:
“For what you paid for those snacks,
you could have provided a nutritious meal for your kids.**

**And then God let me see into the situation a little deeper.
Most likely those kids were in some form of daycare
while the mother tried to earn a living.**

**Feeling guilty for not spending enough time with her children,
she purchased those snacks out of a sense of guilt.
Doing her best to keep her kids happy.**

**Then, I saw a little deeper into her life.
She was a woman of color in a not so tolerant town.
That meant she did not have access to the best jobs.
Probably she was under-employed and underpaid.**

**And it began to dawn on me,
it is much easier to hand someone a couple of bucks
than to sit down someone
and help them develop a budget.
Or help them find better employment.**

**It's quicker and more efficient to pay someone's utility bill
than to help them insulate their house.**

**It costs far less to take food to a food bank
than to train a person how to stretch their food dollar.**

What do you think Jesus would have us do?

Help the situation?

Or help the person?