

Sunday February 5, 2023  
Lesson 10: Loving as God Loves  
Scripture: 1 John 4: 7-21; Ruth 4:9-10

**Context:**

We end our unit “Power and Belonging” jumping between the Old Testament and New Testament. The scriptures include part of the narrative from the book of Ruth in the Old Testament; followed by counsel given to a church community in 1 John. Both passages focus on how love moves people. Our purpose is to celebrate how God’s love transforms and enables us to love one another.

The text from the book of Ruth includes Boaz the Israelite assisting Ruth the Moabite in taking her husband’s inheritance and then continuing her family name. Boaz’s actions tie him to a foreigner and also involve taking on someone’s legacy. The story reminds us of the power of love and how it moves us to do things which are transformative for those around us.

The scripture passage from 1 John is one of the most expressive assertions of the Johannine literature and presents a theology of love. While many would be quick to quote 1 Corinthians and its expression of love, one could conjecture how the Johannine definition gives a distinctly Christian explanation of the origin and human motivation of love.<sup>1</sup> Love coming from God is a distinct characteristic of the Christian faith and is tied specifically to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This is the opening and basis of the passage for today’s lesson as the author begins with calling the audience “beloved” and then goes onto explain how all love comes from the actions of God.

John then lays down how this theology is meant to change and inspire those who follow Christ. There is a reiterative statement “God is love” to mean God is not a feeling, an attitude, an intention, or even an action on the part of human beings.<sup>2</sup> As a result, it holds an expectation for those who belong to the Christian tradition. Because God loves, we ought to love, not only God, but also one another.<sup>3</sup> If we say we love God, then we are making both a profession and confession. And this means then we must practice what we say.

The wording in verse twelve has become central for multiple groups of Christians, especially those who are in specific traditions. The word *teleioun* is “perfected,” and is the litmus given for those who grasp who God is and what God extends to us. Those who are candidates for ministry in the Wesleyan tradition are asked whether they are expected to be perfected in love in this life and are supposed to give a positive answer.<sup>4</sup> The focus is not on what the candidates do as it is focused on what God can and will do in their lives.

The text goes onto to say the practicality of showing God’s love. If there is love, there isn’t fear to spread. And those who hate their brother and sister do not show love. There is a call

---

<sup>1</sup> Smith, D. Moody, “First, Second, and Third John.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 108. (See 1 John 4:8, 16).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

back to Jesus' commandment to the disciples to love one another.

### **Application**

I recently read the Johannine passage to a Bible study group, and we had a deep dive into the text. We discussed the idea of being "perfected in love," and how strong those words are to our lives. I brought up the vow ordinands made to be "perfected in love" in this life and how it expands to those in the local church. All the eyes around the table grew wide as we discussed what this meant and how it offered a daily challenge.

I have come to discover we are often good at knowing how to profess love in God. We can praise God on Sunday morning and give thanks for the life we have been given. Our prayers are lifted, and we feel a release going through our body. The scriptures tell us about the goodness of God, and we can delight in something we experience. Loving God can come in all sorts of ways, and we often can find it rewarding and engaging.

Yet, if you're like me, the whole loving others can be a place where one is pushed. To love others means seeing people where they are as vulnerable human beings and then seeking to see them as God sees them, beloved children of God. They are there for us to see as part of our journey as well, warts and all.

If you're struggling, think of someone who has shown you unconditional love. Hopefully you can think of someone, whether it is a parent, a spouse, a friend, a pastor, or a fellow church member. There are people who we know when we are next to them, they can see us and love us even when there is a struggle for us to be our best selves. And even when those people die or move away, there is a warmth even in the grief for the love we received.

I remember once listening to a podcast where a person discussed the term "intimacy." We often reserve the term intimate for a sexual love, something for those we want to spend our life beside. Yet to do so cheapens the term. The individual expressed intimacy as the ability to express oneself completely in front of another person without fear of abandonment or retribution.

Oddly enough when I heard the speaker say this, I thought of this passage from 1 John. To be made perfect in love casts out fear and thus one can express oneself and see a person for their whole being and love them. This perfection in love is not reserved just for spouses or for people in a family unit. This is meant to be a Christian exercise we daily participate in and find ourselves in sync with those around us.

In the story of Ruth, we hear of someone who seeks to love deeply. Often when we focus on Ruth, we transform the story into a Cinderella biblical narrative. We rarely remember how Ruth was a Moabite, a woman Israelites were not to marry. For Boaz to marry her or take care of her was an eye-raising event. Yet he did as he was moved by love.

The story of Ruth and the love present in the story reminds me of how all of us can be capable of loving deeply and not allowing societal norms to drive us. Often, I notice society enjoys exclusion and dismissal, reflected in behaviors of people. Fear is one of those drivers as others are afraid of others if they are seen loving all people. I have seen it in my own life and in the lives of those I love. Fear can be a powerful force, potent to drive wedges even in the most tight-knit of families, churches, and communities.

The good news of us is the gift of love drives out fear. As God loves us, we are given the same freedom to love others, no matter what others might say or do. The only force we are held accountable to is God, not the Country Club president or the head matriarch/patriarch. God is the one who calls us to love unabashedly, unashamedly, and without judgment. It is God who taught us how to love because God first loved us.

How do you show love to all people? What is the difference between saying “God is love,” and “Love is God?” Who do you think needs some love today? Who are the people who have shown you unconditional love? How can you cast aside fear to love others more deeply?

Rev. Dr. E. Hunter Pugh  
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge  
PO Box 71  
Brantley, AL 36009