



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The First Sunday in Trinity, June 2nd, 2013

**In the Name of the Father ✠ and of the Son
and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.**

There is something especially apt about the selection of this passage from the Epistles – The First Epistle General of St. John 4:7-21 -- for the start of the Trinity Season. It is a neatly encapsulated course of study that in modern academic lingo would probably be called "Fellowship with God 101."

St. John's object is to bring us into fellowship with God and to secure us against losing that fellowship. His epistle is, in large part, an exposition of the Christian revelation: "God is love."

John immediately gets down to brass tacks. Verses 7 & 8 read: "Beloved let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

He reiterates 'God is love' in Verse 16: "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

St. John explains to us that God is perfect love – and not any abstract way. He is love in living, in personal activity and in relationships. Love, according to John, is the highest attribute of God's Being. God's love, he says, has been manifested to us in two ways.

First, he sent his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to redeem mankind from sin and to give us eternal life in fellowship with him. And in doing so, he has saved us from all the fears that would normally torment us concerning our inevitable judgment.

Second, God has manifested his love to us in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts – engendering in us a love that is not only a response to his outreach to us, but is also a love that is displayed in our love for our fellow men.

Because God loves, John explains, we love; and as he loves, so ought we to love one another. Our love of our neighbor, he says, is the acid outward test by which we can discover the sincerity of our inward love of the invisible Father, whose nature and purpose were made known to us in Jesus.

The First Epistle General, Chapter 4: Verses 7-21 is quoted with particular approval today. It dovetails with some of the decidedly odd things that are preached in so many an churches these days. It's employed to advance the dubious notion that God is somehow completely – to use another buzzword – non-judgmental.

But this isn't what John is saying. Read the Epistle from start to finish and discover John's thoughts revolve around three great watchwords concerning God: He is perfect light; He is perfectly righteous; and He is perfect love.

The concept of perfection applied to light, righteousness and love is wholly at odds with the idea God is uncritically loving and "non-judgmental"

The fact of the matter is that because God is perfectly righteous, he is, by his very nature, perfectly judgmental. And this, in turn, means that because we, humans, fall exceedingly short of his standards of perfection when it comes to light and love, we are inevitably headed for very deep trouble.

That's the bad news. The good news is that if we examine our consciences and confess our sins, God, as John writes, "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This isn't merely an option. It's an obligation. As John succinctly puts it, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

John tells us that God requires us to strive to be righteous – a word that the dictionary defines as "upright; virtuous; acting in a just, upright manner." There's nothing passive about righteousness. In order to BE righteous you have to DO righteousness. Similarly, you can't be a bit righteous, anymore than it's possible to be just a bit pregnant. With pregnancy and righteousness, it's a case of all or nothing.

One cannot be righteous by simply keeping one's nose clean and living carefully. One has to deal righteously with people which means virtuously, honestly and justly. Nor can we be righteous on a part time basis: righteous towards friends, but not towards

enemies – or, for that matter, vice versa.

The stumbling block that confronts us is our basic human nature. Truth to tell, we really don't like being loving and kind – in the way God is to us.

So how can we reconcile God's demand that we walk in his light and in righteousness – in other words, uphold the Christian truth and live virtuously and justly – with his demand that we love our fellow men?

To be sure, we cannot ignore the faults, flaws and weaknesses of our fellow men. But it is vital we don't allow this to seduce us into viewing the world in terms of "them and us." We must never lose sight of the fact that we are also sinners. We have so much sinful baggage of our own to deal with, we can't afford the luxury of pointing the finger at others. There is absolutely no virtue to be gained from resisting sins to which one isn't tempted.

According to John, the important thing is to consider how God behaves towards us – and then to try to apply the model, as best we can, to our own lives. And our best guide towards achieving this Jesus' summary of the Law:

"Hear O Israel, the Lord that God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul and with all thy strength. This is the first Commandment. And the Second is like, namely this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

AMEN

To the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and forever. AMEN