

In our times together, I will be teaching on four types love. This morning, I'll begin with God's love.

If you have your Bible, I hope you do, it's important for our times together. Find **1 John 4**. Its a tough little book to find, very close to the end, very close to the maps.

Look with me at **1 John 4:7**, *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”* Stop right there. Here is John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, who says that our problems in loving people are rooted in our inadequate knowledge of God. In his essence, *“God is love.”* And when you know God, really know God, intimately know God, then the essence of God transforms you into a lover.

So as we begin our exploration of love, we must begin with God. And when it comes to knowing God, it's best to begin where the Bible begins.

Turn to the first page. **Genesis 1:1**. *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”* The first thing we are told about God in the Bible is that God is a creator. Why? Why does the Bible start here? Why not start with God as Truth?! or Beauty?! And why is God creating? What exactly is he doing? What's the reason for the universe? And why did he create us?

Now the answer to these questions takes us to the heart of what John was getting at back in **1 John 4:8**, when he says, *“God is love.”*

It's the ancient Celtic Christians who have been most helpful for me in coming to have a sense of what's going on here.

One of their great insights was that this moment of creation. It's similar to that moment when a husband and wife turn to one another in the still of the night, and in that timeless moment... love is made...and a child is created. Why does this couple make a child out of their love? They bring a child into existence so that they can have someone to share their love with. A child, in this case, is the overflow of the love between a husband and a wife.

And this is a great way to begin to understand who God is and why God created us. Before time and space even existed it was the love of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit that created us.

The ancient Celtic Christians they had this rich understanding of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as dancing ecstatically in their love for one another. And their love, their dance is full of joy and fervor and passion and celebration. And they decide to create us in order to invite us to share in the joy of their dance. It's not that they *need* more dancers.¹ “God has no hunger that needs to be filled”² It's just that their love is so full and so generous and so abundant. The Father,

the Son, and the Holy Spirit created everything that exists out of the joyous overflow of their love...of their dance.

That's how the Celtic Christians thought about God and His creation.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit constantly and forever dancing in perfect bliss, perfect harmony, ecstatic joy. God created the whole universe in order to share in this love.

You know what? It's kind of like when your child gets married, and you invite as many friends as you can to the wedding. Why? Because we want everyone to share in our own love and joy.³

Something very much like that is what brought about creation in the first place: the love of God bubbled over.⁴

“Like a shaken-up bottle of champagne.”⁵ The love of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit is so full, that the entire cosmos was created out of it. And we are invited to share in the life and love...to join in the dance of God.

But there's more. Look down at v.3

Gen 1:3-4a = “It's good that you exist” **10 12 16-18 21 25 26, 31**

“It's good that you exist, it's good that you are in this world. When God looks at you, he looks at you with love in his eyes, and he is glad that you are alive. That you are a person. ‘It's good,’ God says, ‘that you are a part of my creation. I want you to exist. I cannot imagine my universe without you. I refuse to accept the possibility of creation without you. You are truly irreplaceable in my world. How wonderful that you exist. I love you.’”

As we keep reading we get another ASPECT of God's love...

Gen 2:15-17; 3:1, 6-9

Those words, “Where are you?” We hear the heart of a lover crying out from an empty house. Crying out for his beloved. In loving you, God desires deeply to be with you. He longs for you to join Him in the love that is the dance of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

One of the most profound PORTRAITS of love is in the book of Hosea...

Hosea 1:2-3; 3:1-2; 11:1-4, 8

Have you ever been “loved with that kind of love, that was not erotic, not even friendship, but was sheer delight? I guess the best way to ask it is: Have you ever felt loved just by the look in someone's eyes? It was not a look of lust, or anything else...just a look that delighted in you, as you.” I'm not even talking about infatuation, you know the first blush of romantic love. I'm talking being looked at this way by someone who knows you well. Someone who is under no illusion about your weaknesses?

This is what Hosea's story teaches us about God and His love for us. Have you ever seen in someone's eyes total acceptance, and sheer delight? Delight that you exist. It's good that you exist. Good for me that you exist. You delight me, just by being alive.

- Some of you mothers know what I'm talking about. When you first held your child in your arms. That's the look you had when you gazed upon her face.
- Adults, in that moment, when you feel loved in that way, you feel in the presence of that person, that you can achieve almost anything."⁶

This was the look that Gomer saw in the eyes of Hosea as he was purchasing her from her sexual slavery.

Turn to the S of S, here we have a **BEAUTIFUL** and **ELEGANT** display of God's love...

Song of Solomon 2:4

Here we see that to be loved by God is to be singled out...to be picked...And most of all, when God loves us, it means that he rejoices in our happiness. Josef Pieper, a brilliant German philosopher, says "To love is to rejoice in the happiness of the beloved."⁷ When you join in the dance of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and you celebrate and luxuriate in his love. When you let his love wash over you and fill you with love...as your soul leaps for joy – God leaps for joy.

Of course, we must look at the most famous verse in the Bible.

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world."

Do you see it? Do you sense some of the wondrous depth of this love?

- It means that *God is glad* that the world, and you! That *you* exist.
- And in his love for you, he *longs to be united* with you, to be one with you, for you to join him in the close intimacy of the dance between the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- It means that God is *looking at you with love* in his eyes and right now. Right now he is looking at you and he loves you, and he is delighted in you the real you that is buried inside and is scared to come out.
- This verse means that he has *singled you out, picked you*, and he rejoices in your happiness.

And so because of this incredible love...what does the rest of this verse say, *"he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*

Because God loves you and me, and because we have wandered away.

- Like **Adam and Eve**, we have hidden ourselves in the shame of our guilt.
- Like **Gomer**, we have betrayed God's love and loved others instead of him.
- So, John 3:16 tells us – God, love took on flesh.

And oh the stories...when people met love in the flesh...when they met "love incarnate"...when people looked into the *eyes that were* the root and source of love...ahhh the stories...Like in Luke...

(From now on, when read the texts, anytime the name "Jesus" is used, or a pronoun for Him, gloss it to either "Love-In-The-Flesh," or "Love.")

Luke 7:36-38

This lady, like all of us, was one “one vast need.”⁸ Like Adam and Eve she was covered in the shame of her guilt. Like Gomer she had attempted to fill her need with men. Like so many today, and perhaps some in this room she was not in the dance. But when she saw love in the flesh... In his eyes there was acceptance and sheer delight and she joined the dance.

Luke 19:1-8

The German poet, **Goethe** once wrote: *“A heart that loves one person, cannot hate anyone.”* Suddenly, Zaccheus meets love, Love-in-the-flesh, and looking into his eyes, suddenly for Zaccheus, there was no longer any ordinary person. For Zaccheus had been loved, accepted, picked, delighted in. He had experienced love. And now everyone he met he too loved, in other words, he was genuinely and deeply delighted that they existed. Now Zaccheus saw all of God’s creation as good.

You see, Zaccheus discovered that God’s love is a consuming fire. He was a rich greedy man. Before meeting love, he didn’t notice people – he didn’t care for people – he only saw pocket books – he only saw money, he only loved money. In this story we see why the great french intellect, Georges **Bernanos**, said, *“the fire of God’s love is a thousand times hotter than the fires of hell.”*⁹ In Zaccheus, the love of God had consumed everything and transformed everything into itself.

John 13:1-5, 12 (when reading highlight fact that Christ knew of Judas’ intended betrayal and yet he [Love-In-The-Flesh] washed even Judas’ feet.)

We all want to be loved for our cleverness, our beauty. We all want to be loved for our wit and kindness, our generosity, because we are unique and useful. But the first hint that someone is loving us despite and inspite of our abilities... It’s a shock. To receive love like a beggar on the street taking a hand out. And to go on receiving from someone this love that does not depend on our own beauty or ability or character... It’s painful.

C. S. Lewis once described by saying, Suppose you’re a man. And shortly after getting married you get a terrible and incurable disease. It won’t kill you, at least not soon. But for years you are useless, impotent, hideous, disgusting. You are dependent on your wife’s income. But your needs, your care, your disease... it’s expensive. And you deplete all the money your wife can make. You drag your family into poverty. Debt after debt after debt. The car is repossessed, the house is repossessed. And let’s say, it’s worse than that. Even your intellect is destroyed. And you are shaken by explosions of an uncontrollable temper. You are full of unavoidable demands. And in the midst of all this, your wife cares for you, takes care of you, and her love and kindness and patience and her pity for you is inexhaustible.¹⁰

That’s John 13. You and I are Judas. We are traitors to our creator, to love. And Love takes a towel, and washes our feet and invites us back into the dance – me, broken, pitiful, me, with my vast unending needs.

Shortly after Love washed the feet of the betrayer... there’s an extraordinary moment...

Matthew 26:47-50

“Friend.” You see, If your love for someone ends the moment that their qualities vanish. I mean, when their beauty, or their youth, or their success, when it vanishes, if your love vanishes – then

it never existed in the first place. When it comes to love, the kind of love that we are experiencing this morning, when it comes to this love, the test question, is *not*: Do you find the other person likeable, capable, ‘nice,’ or attractive? No, the question is: Are you glad for his existence? Are you delighted that she exists? OR do you have anything against his existence. Can you honestly say, of that person that you claim to love, “It’s good that you exist”?

Sure when love is taking its very first step, the spark is some quality, some attractiveness. Her beauty, his charm. But “infatuation is not love; at most it is the beginning of love.”¹¹ But when love has become real love it will then penetrate to the core of the other person. It will go to the heart of the person who stands behind those attractive qualities. Love goes to the beloved’s inner most self. That part of the person which *remains* even when all the lovable qualities long since have vanished. You see, this kind of love no longer has need of those things.¹²

And here we are, betraying Love with our lust & greed, our anger and selfishness, our abuse, our pettiness, and rudeness. But he still loves us, and in the midst of our terrible act he looks us in the eye, with his eyes full of love and calls us **“Friend.”**

We tortured and murdered Love, nailing him to a cross.

But Love refused to let even murder be the end of the story. Love rose from dead

And now, Love is drawing all things into the dance (Rev 21:5).

And right now, Love invites you into the dance.

¹ Glenn Miller, “Good Question: Was God so ‘needy’ that He had to create the universe?,” *The Christian Think Tank*, n.p. [cited 26 May 2007]. Online: <http://www.christian-thinktank.com/needygod.html>.

² C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Books, 1960), 126.

³ “John 3:1-17,” *Center for Excellence in Preaching, This Week*, n.p. [cited 26 May 2007]. Online: <http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/thisWeek/viewContent.php?iID=45&sID=1>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Greg Brown, personal email, on May 10, 2007 at 5:58pm.

⁷ Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997 [1986]), 231. Originally published as three separate volumes. Title of the German original: *Über die Liebe*, 7th ed (Munich: Kösel-Verlag GmbH & Co., 1992).

⁸ Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 3

⁹ Georges Bernanos, *Die Freude*, 2nd ed, 1953, 46. Cited in Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 192.

¹⁰ Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 133.

¹¹ Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 250.

¹² *Ibid.*, 205, 6.