

“Testifying to the Love”

1 John 4:12:-21

This week we are still continuing our journey through the letters of John. Now if you've been with us the last few weeks you may have noticed a theme going on in the letter as we go further into the document. For those of you haven't been with us, that theme is focused on the love of God and the love that we have for each other in Jesus Christ. Love is at the core of the first letter of John.

As I was best preparing the sermon and thinking about ways of further explaining the love of God that we experience, I was beginning to come up with similar ideas that the previous sermons had already addressed. Not that reminders of how God's love for us is so crucial, but I wanted to take a new spin on the love of God so that we might be built up stronger in our faith.

After some time, I found an idea that we can learn from in this passage. The focus of our thoughts this morning is in 1 John 4:14-16 which reads “We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the savior of the world. If any of us confess that Jesus is God's Son, God remains in us and we remain in God. We have known and have believed the love that God has for us.”

We often hear a great deal about God's love for us, not only in this letter but throughout the Bible and in other preachers and teachers of the Gospel. If there is any consolation in the world of hardship and uncertainty that we live in it is the love of God through Jesus Christ that can sustain us in our life. Yet what can we do with that love so that others may live?

The last few sermons have focused on the love that we receive from God and the love that we can extend to our brothers and sisters. But what can we do to spread the love that is found in Christ? What do we do with the great gift that we receive?

It would be a shame to have the love of God and do nothing with it and keep it only for ourselves. It's easy to receive a gift and enjoy it completely for yourself. That's how our society works in our consumerist world. We think of only taking for ourselves and don't necessarily think of giving to others. That's why sometimes it is so astonishing to hear stories of people giving of themselves of their time or talents to a cause greater than themselves. It's not what we first think of when it comes to live. We live in a world where we are to take and then take some more.

But the world that Jesus Christ came to proclaim and bring about on earth is not a world where we constantly take for ourselves. Instead, Jesus Christ came so that others could have a life that would live in such a way where others would receive life. Jesus didn't come into the world to take from others, but to give to others. It is apparent in his death and resurrection on the cross that we can see that Christ calls us to give of ourselves so that others can live a life better than they had before. Christ came so that we might have life abundantly and in the resurrection over death we see that life everlasting is what Christ testifies to in his example.

In all of this, what do we do? What do we do in order to counter the consumerist thinking of taking for ourselves? It is right there in the text. That is testifying to the love of God in Christ Jesus. It's giving and sharing what we have received in our experience so that others may know the peace and grace that comes through a relationship in Jesus Christ.

Sometimes though, we get a little nervous when we hear the word "testify." Certainly we have reason to, for the word is used in legal proceedings for when one is called before the court to give information in a case whether that be a civil or criminal situation. Sometimes we have bad experiences in tough situations and we tense up for we think of those bad experiences when we hear the word.

Sometimes we hear the word in our Christian context and we begin to tense up as well. We think of people coming to our door with their ideas of Christ and trying to force them down our throats. We think of awkward moments when someone has tried to explain their faith but for whatever reason turned you off from the faith instead of building you up in the faith. It's uneasy to hear some people testify, because of this fact that it can turn us away from the faith.

Yet in all of this, we are told in scripture that we are to testify to the faith. We have many stories of testifying to the faith throughout the Bible. I think the testimony that stands out very clear is the testimony of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was the person who began to clear the way for Jesus Christ. He was baptizing folks in the name of God and in the name of the One that was to come later, which was Jesus Christ. He was clear in his testimony that he was not the one who came in the light, but rather he was the one testifying to the light. He made it clear of the source of the light and lived in a way that would proclaim the truth of God.

Many other times in the scriptures we have prophets and important people of the faith story proclaiming the mystery and wonder of God to other people. We wouldn't be able to spread our faith if we weren't able to spread the good news that we experience. It's absolutely critical that we testify to the light that John the Baptist testified to as well.

Now you may be thinking that sharing your faith or your testimony may be something that makes you uncomfortable. I can tell you that even though I am a pastor I can have some hesitation in testifying in my own faith. It makes one vulnerable to talk about your faith openly with someone, even if they are a close friend, and especially so if they are a complete stranger.

I know there are some people out there who have a real gift for sharing their testimony with folks. You may be a person who care share your faith easily with another person, and that is

an excellent thing. You should continue to do so and continue to pray for inspiration and the opportunity to share your faith at all times possible. It's a gift of faith that should not be squandered or tossed aside. Engage the gift of sharing your testimony so that others may know the love of Jesus Christ and so that others may know the peace and new life that is found in the resurrected Jesus Christ.

But what if you don't have the gift of sharing your faith? What if you are unable to share your faith with those that you come into contact with because of work policies or if you don't know if it would be polite to talk about your faith? There are ways to share your faith and testify to the light of Christ without deliberately speaking of your faith.

I think the best testimony a person can give to their faith is simply by prayerfully living your life and treating all of the people that you come into contact with like they are Christ themselves. We have heard the scriptures tell us that when we act with love to the least of people we are working with Christ. When we greet a person in love then we are sharing our testimony, because you might just open up the opportunity for the person to ask questions about your faith, and then you can share as you are comfortable about their faith.

This act goes with the thought of giving the person an opportunity to ask you about your faith, so you don't feel like you are being pushy or rude. There is nothing wrong about inviting questions, and I believe that simple questions and answers about Christ's love in the name of the Christ can help us to spread our faith. It is testifying without feeling like you are testifying.

I believe that as a congregation we need to be prepared to testify to the love of God. It is simply good outreach. We can have the best worship service and best programs for involvement, but if we do not have the ability to share our faith in whatever capacity, then we will not be able to be a congregation that testifies to the love of Christ. We can do a million things that seem

good on the surface, but if they do not share the love of Christ, then they are pointless. If this congregation is to thrive, then we need to be able to have good outreach and so that we can testify about God.

My last point is that we need to be conscious in that all that we do we point to God. We need to be less focused on ourselves, but on the people outside of these four walls. Yes, we may be comfortable here in sitting in worship, but it is all for nothing if we do not share the love of Christ with our neighbors on the street and in the mission field. We have to turn the focus to God and to sharing the Gospel with others.

John the Baptist was clear in turning to focus from him to Christ, for he did not want to focus on him, but on Christ. John the Baptist could have left the focus on what he was doing, but he was clear in avoiding this situation. All that we do as a church and all that we do as an individual believer in Christ needs to put the focus on Christ.

1 John states that if we confess that Jesus is God's son, then God will remain in us and we will remain in God. This means that as long as we proclaim the message of Christ to the world then we will experience the love and peace of God in our lives, further enriching our lives and all the lives that we come into contact with. Our society wants us to think of only ourselves, but we are to think of others and especially of Christ, so that others may have the gift of life.

I strongly encourage you all to pray carefully on how you can testify to the light of Christ. Take a chance, and live in a way that testifies to the love of Christ. Once you discover that testifying to the light is natural in whatever capacity, then you will have the opportunity to spread your blessings to other people. Pray and follow the example of John the Baptist and the example of our readings from 1 John, and testify to the light and to the love that is found in the savior of the world, Jesus Christ. Amen.