

2 John 1-6

"What is Love?"

What is love? It's not just a bad 80s song. It's a real thing we have to work within our lives. What do we do with this strange word and ultimately strange emotion? We hear of love a lot in our experience as Christians and as humans, but what do we do with it? This is a challenge that all Christians face as they work together in the community for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Last week I made a reference to the shortness of these two letters, and I inadvertently stated that 3 John was the shortest of the three letters of John. Well, turns out, I really misspoke. This is the shortest of the three letters. So if you are feeling the need to be scholarly and feel like you need to read a full book of the bible but don't have the time, then take a gander at 2 John.

2 John was written much to the same community of early Christians that 1 John was written. It was a community trying to find their way and understand their faith in the world around them. It would have been a challenge to keep the faith in such a time, but I believe that the community was able to prosper by having writers such as John telling the community to hold on and keep doing what they are doing in Jesus Christ.

There are two themes in 2 John, one of love and the other of teaching. Today we address love. You may be thinking that we have examined love from all possible angles because 1 John talks much of love, but there is still more to know. Using a Wesleyan principle as a guide of thought, if we are not moving forward in our understanding and knowledge of love then where are we going? We should devote ourselves to the study of love because it is through the love of Jesus Christ that we have the eternal life and salvation that we can experience this day in our lives.

Yet in this study of love, we quickly learn that love is very complex. Greek has many different forms of the word love. The two most commonly used are philew, and agapaw. We know philew as brotherly love, or the fraternal love between family members or friends. The other love, agapaw, is the love between believers, the love that transcends and is completely unconditional.

In English I believe we are at a disadvantage with the word love, because we use the word love from anywhere from "I really love that color on you" to "I love you my wife" to "I love you God." We use the word in so many different ways it is hard for us to fully appreciate the words used in the New Testament for love. I believe that we pushes us to dive deeper into the text and ultimately, deeper into our faith.

The word that John uses to the community for love is agapaw. In Christian circles this word gets stated as agape. If you've been in the church for some time you may have heard the word used as agape. Agape and agapaw mean the same thing and are actually the word. Agape is the more anglicized word for agapaw. Agapaw is truer to the Greek, but for our study today, the words are the same, so feel free to keep both words in your mind.

But what is agapaw, or agape? What is meaning is John trying to convey to the reader? What is John trying to say when he requests that we love in each other. Here the words again from today's reading. (Read 2 John 1-6).

I believe that John is trying to tell the community that they are to live in love that transcends what they are told to do around them. In the culture outside of the early Christian communities it was not expected that you love other people the same way that you would love your friends. Love was reserved for those close to you. To be in a communal setting and extend the same love for one person that you know closely to someone that you really don't know was

revolutionary at the time. The society that was in the Roman Empire was one that was based on fear and respect. Roman citizens would fear the Gods in such a way that was life-taking rather than life-giving. The elite of Roman society expected to be feared, for they had the power to hurt you.

John is writing that the community should stand in love. I believe the components of the love that the community is to wrap themselves in can be found in the greeting of the letter. John writes in the greeting "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, will be our guide who live in truth and love."

I believe that the components of love, especially agapaw love stand in the words grace, mercy, and peace. These three words are components of agapaw that we can live into this day as Christians in the 21st century.

We have been extended Grace from God through the saving work of Jesus Christ and we are to extend grace to each other at all times, even when it might be difficult. As church and as a human institution we know that we have to get along, but sometimes we have a hard time working with another person, especially when they have done us wrong. I am guilty of such feelings, for sometimes I mess up and hurt people. I am not free from mistakes. So when I believe that someone has done me wrong I remember that I myself make mistakes, and that I should extend grace to those who hurt. Especially in the church, the community that John was writing to, this is vital that we extend grace to our brothers and sisters in Christ. We love our brothers and sisters in Christ no matter what, especially in grace. We have been extended grace in Christ, so as a people that seek to love as Christ did, we extend Grace.

Agapaw love also has a component of mercy. God was merciful to us through the forgiveness of sins through the saving work of Jesus Christ, and it is through the mercy of God

that we have eternal life, now and forever as believers in the Gospel. Mercy is something that we can extend to people in our community and beyond our church community when people are in need of help. We extend mercy to people in our designated giving each month. In our keeping of the food closet we extend mercy to those who are in need of care. Agapaw is about mercy. Mercy in the Christian sense is life giving, a component of love that we should live in as Christians.

The last component of love that comes to us in the greeting from John to the community is peace. Peace can take many forms and as Christians we have peace in the assurance that when we pass from this life we will never die. We have peace knowing that it is through Jesus Christ that we can have life abundantly while we are on this earth. We have peace knowing that we can love each other as a community, as families, as individuals. Peace is a part of love. In a world that thrives on conflict and putting one ahead of another person in order for self-service, we have peace. Peace is what we have when we tell the world that we are not going to act like the world, and we choose to live in the love of God as exemplified by Jesus Christ, and guided by the Holy Spirit.

All of these things, are just a tip of the iceberg of the kind of love that John tells the community to live into. I encourage you all to look inside yourselves and find what love, the agapaw love, means to you, as a Christian, and as a community. We are commandment to make disciples of the world and it is in this love of agapaw that we can do that. We have a great deal to share to the world, it must be our passion to share it with others, and bring others to the love that is found in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

This morning we will partake in an act of love that we often gloss over and view a part of the routine. Today we celebrate communion, an act of love given to us by Jesus Christ that

shows us the grace, mercy, and peace that can come through a relationship with Christ. Christ died for our sins, so that we can live a new life. Through the broken body and blood of Christ and in the ultimate sacrifice of himself we can live a new day, a new way of live that goes beyond anything we can imagine.

Today as we partake of the sacred meal of communion, think about how you can share the love of Christ to your neighbor, be it the person next to you, the person you disagree with or the person you meet on the street later today. We live as a sign of the love of Christ, so that others might live. Today is a new beginning of love.

John writes that we are to love, so today, love in such a way that those you meet will be able to have an answer to the question, "what is love?" amen.