

Open in Love
Courage to Continue Series
Jubilee Mennonite Church
October 21, 2018

Bryce Miller

Purpose: To invite the openness of spirit born of God's love to be a fundamental characteristic of reconciliation.

Message: As people who have embraced by God's love, we are invited to extend that breadth of embrace to others.

Scripture: *1 John 4:7-21 I will read, John 15:1-10*

Synopsis: We think much about the dangers of our world. From little up, we need to be taught what it is to fear, sometimes rightfully (this is dangerous, therefore we keep away) and sometimes it is the way of the world seeping in around us, despite our better efforts. When we take to heart the spirit of fear of the other—whom ever that may be—we struggle to live out what we most are as people of faith: the reflectors of the love of God. Love across traditions invites us to risk much, surpassing that which would bind us to embrace better that which God invites us to be. God's love is the root of what we do, and it flows through us toward all who we encounter, regardless of their personal response. The work of reconciliation is the work of incarnating God's love in us.

Love is a feeling that has no boundaries – give it, accept it, and feel its power.

■ Ojibway Sacred Teaching

1 John 4:7-21 ⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. ¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶ So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹ We love ¹ because he first loved us. ²⁰ Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters,¹ are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister ² whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. ²¹ The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters¹ also.

1 John 4:7-19

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another,

because love is from God;
everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

⁸ Whoever does not love
does not know God, for God is love.

⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way:

God sent God's only Son into the world
so that we might live through him.

¹⁰ In this is love,

not that we loved God
but that God loved us
and sent the Son to be atoning sacrifice for our sins.

¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much,
we also ought to love one another.

¹² No one has ever seen God;
if we love one another,
God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in God and God in us,
because God has given us of his Spirit.

¹⁴ And we have seen
and do testify that God
has sent the Son as the Savior of the world.

¹⁵ God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God,
and they abide in God.

¹⁶ So we have known
and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love,
and those who abide in love abide in God,
and God abides in them.

¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this:

that we may have boldness on the day of judgment,
because as Christ is, so are we in this world.

¹⁸ There is no fear in love,
but perfect love casts out fear;
for fear has to do with punishment,
and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

¹⁹ We love¹ because God first loved us.

When I moved to Canada, I made a list of everything I owned. It is required when moving across borders to inventory everything that you have with you to show to the customs officials as personal contents. Among the sundry bits and bobs of life were a whole lot of books. Lots and lots and lots of books. I took a look at the inventory and it has listed 18 boxes of books. We had still more when we moved here to Winnipeg, combining two theological libraries together. I won't try to claim that I have read even half of what I have on the shelf. One thing that you learn quickly in seminary is that there is no possible way to actually complete everything you are assigned to read. It will drive you mad and bury you before the second week of the semester. You learn quickly to discern between that which wants to be read for depth, that which is background, and the stuff you can afford to skim in the name of sanity. All of these books, each one trying to explain the ways of the Spirit and the meaning of faith with a seemingly unending supply of words.

But then you have this. God is love. Three words. Nice and simple, pretty much straight to the point. You cannot do much better if you were looking for the core of what all of those boxes of books and pages of writing were on about. Its enough to make you wonder whether all of those pounds of books are worth it. God is love and you are loved. Each one of you are loved. If this is not the core of the good news, I do not know what is. Last Sunday the congregation I grew up in celebrated its bicentennial. The turn of the 20th century sanctuary with its paneled wood ceiling and hardwood floors has one permanent piece of art in the space. The open bible with a painted ribbon with God is Love towering over everything else that was said and done down below. This simple, wonderful, powerful truth is both the culmination of all of our understanding of God, and the beginning of the conversation that it triggers. There is something so elemental and true to these basic words that they would seem beyond addition or improvement. Yet cannot stop with this simple statement. Because a start like that needs some elaboration.

We cannot stop there because God does not stop there. It is one thing for one of God's primary attributes to be love. There is more to this statement because God does not stop simply by being love, though that is enough, but acts out of that love for the sake of the beloved creation; every last one of us. God is love and in love God does things. God is love, and in that love, God has acted throughout all of history and continues to act within our story. God is love

and in loving sends Jesus to show a way to live, a way to follow, and to be reconciled to God by way of the cross. God is love and offers a way for love to continue in salvation opening the kingdom of God to all who would come after. God is love and we are invited to live within that love and through that love, manifesting it to the world. Because God acts out of that love and does things in that love that there is more to the story, more to the meaning of these essential words than just an academic statement of fact about the nature of God.

The writer of 1 John is trying to give us more than a simple equation here; they are trying to speak to the nature of God and the call of God on the human life. The temptation is to hear these words of God is love and to treat them as a simple equation. God equals love; followed closely by the logic of love equals God. This is the reflexive property. X equals apple, therefore apple equals X. We take this and we hold it and apply the logic that if it is what we know to be love, then it must by definition be of God. But this is not what John is commending us toward here. There is a sequence here, an action and response. We love because and only because God first loved us. We are able to know love, express love, incarnate love, embody love, respond in love not out of our own will, or our natural goodness, but because of God's love for us, because of God's initiative to reach out for us, to draw us toward God, to embrace us as we are in love. It is in God we are loved, and because of God we express love to those close to us and to those we have not even yet met.

The indigenous elders hold up love as connecting us, rightly, to creator, and from creator to being loving with all of creation. They rightly point out that love, to be known and to be lived must first be understood and held for one's self. We need to know and to accept that we are loved, first, foremost and forever more. We need to find what ever ways we can find to do the work that we often find most difficult—to love ourselves in God's love, accepting ourselves, our circumstances, and reconciling with God and with our brothers and sisters the best ways we know how.

We cannot address love, however, without addressing fear. Fear is what keeps us from loving. It is that which we construct to convince ourselves that the ways of self protection are the way the world should function. Fear is with us and fear is a learned response. I don't think I fully appreciated that reality before becoming a father. We are not in born with a sense of fear. We naturally think somehow that if we stand up on our high chair and jump into our parents

arms that you will be caught, regardless of whether or not the person you are jumping at happens to be looking and ready or not. We have to be taught that not everyone in the grocery aisle wants to be our friend, and that we shouldn't automatically try to make them so. We have to be taught that things do not always work out well, and that there are likely outcomes to vulnerability that will come our way. Fear keeps us from risking the step of loving beyond ourselves.

Risk is not a word that you hear in church. Churches in general may be among most risk adverse institutions around if you think about it. By in large we understand the purpose of religion is to save us from risk, not to invite us to it. We keep trying to tame God to fit our aversion to vulnerability, to exposing ourselves to risk; the very quality required for us to love and to be loved. We fear to love in the way that God loves because we often know all too well the vulnerability that this requires of us. We know that when you love, more than likely you will get injured along the way. We want the hallmarks of community and comradery without the sacrifice of self-interest such a community requires. We would rather settle for the passivism of the pews, for the pleasant and safe than to risk getting tangled up out there in the messiness of the world.

But Jesus will not leave us alone to live in the safety of the law. The love of God is far bigger than that. Like the all prophets before him, he points not toward what to do or call us to just love differently or better. Instead he reframes the question and points us to not what to be, but who to be as the way of explaining the will of YHWH. When we hear commandments of love, we think of law and order, chiseled in stone when all the time what God has in mind is hearts and minds willing to risk much. Because God is a God of risk. You might wonder what sort of risks God would take. I mean being God and all, the odds are somewhat stacked in God's favor. God created us, God breathed life into us. You would think God has things pretty well in hand. But God turns around and gives us freedom, a soul and a spark to think for ourselves. In doing so, God risks rejection of the way God has set out for us, and from the very first that is exactly what we do. But time and again God keeps coming back and risking relationship with people, loving them into being. Even when God gives up and storms off and floods the place, he comes back and starts over again, even rebuking his own behavior by promising never to do something like that again. Over and over again in love God risks, and never more so than when God comes in the form of humanity to embrace in love once and for all.

This is what it means to be a disciple of Christ—to risk with Christ the scorn of the world by living beyond our fears of rejection, of failure, of being odd. It means to risk loving because God loves us. Do we do everything and anything, the more bold the better just because God asks to risk? No; we can not and we should not take our fear lightly. We learn our fear well for good reason. Yet, for too long we have made faith and church about the things that we do, the traditions that we hold, the hymns that we sing, and the creeds that we confess then the real risks we take as a consequence of our love of God and love of neighbour. Where are we being called into a different way of being people of faith beyond just polite protest and quiet worship. Dare we risk the vulnerability that would declare that I am who I am and I do what I do because of the kingdom to which I belong; that I do what it is I do in the way that I do it as a direct result of my calling to be about the work of God; the work of love? Dare we as a congregation take a step and risk vulnerability with our neighbours being who we are, allowing them to be who they are, and loving them all the same? Jubilee has done well with this. We can always do better. Dare we risk with each other the authenticity of true relationship that would make “I don’t know” and “I struggle to understand, strain to believe” or even “I struggle with sin in my life” part of the conversation of the church in the body? Can we risk laying aside our polite fiction that we come here because we have everything figured out, and say instead that we gather here exactly because we are broken, because we hurt, because we are in need—each in our own way, and by doing so begin to share our authentic selves together, held in the common truth of God’s love? Can we risk moving from only saying what we don’t like about church, what we distrust and find boring, and articulate a positive vision of who we want to be as a church not in opposition to anything, but in affirmation of who we really are? Dare we live the life of love to which we are called? Dare we love as we have been loved?

That’s a lot to ask. That’s a lot to risk. But in love, that is always the way. May we be given the courage for this hour, risking much, loving deeply, and looking with anticipation for that which God is about to do as with love with heart soul and mind, and out neighbor as our selves.

Notes:

[Abide in me 1joh4 7-21 5-10-2009.doc](#)

[Complex Simplicity Matt 22 34-46 9-28-2014](#)

[To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly](#)

["God has given the community of faith a certain, scary freedom to find out what](#)

[Keshia Thomas Shields a Racist From Harm](#)

[Enemy Love – Dietrich Bonhoeffer | Abnormal Anabaptist](#)

[Who You Call When You Ain't Got No Other Hope? A Sermon on Orlando, the Garasene](#)

[Demoniac, and God's Mercy](#)

[1 Corinthians 13: An Antidote to Violence: Love](#)

[Loving the stranger in a culture of fear - ChristianWeek](#)

[Acceptance does not equal agreement - ChristianWeek](#)