

Love one another
1John 4:1-11
April 28, 2024

As you heard and read the Epistle lesson for today, you may have wondered at first what testing the spirits has to do with loving one another. It almost seems that you should be on the lookout for those spirits who are not from the Lord, to not fall prey to their temptations. John writes of testing them to see where they stand, if they have the spirit of truth and of error.

Then he ends this text with loving one of another. Looking for truth and error and then love? Strange, one would think. What does love have to do with truth and error? They seem so far apart from each other.

There is a Death Valley days episode where a guy won a contest, a contest for the homeliest man in Nevada. He won the award and a little later helped out a beautiful girl. In her gratitude she accepted his invitation to go with him to a dance. He, as time went on, kept doing things for her, even though she didn't know it was him that was doing it. When she found out it was him and no one else, it caused her to think of even more of him.

One day an explosion disfigured the face of the homeliest man in Nevada and he was hospitalized. The hospital had a plastic surgeon who was going to put his face back together. While he was thinking that he might have the surgeon change a few things with his homely face. The pretty girl who had eventually found out who it was that was doing loving things for her without her knowing it came to visit him in the hospital. In that visit she told him that she didn't want him to change his looks because she fell in love with the face of the homeliest man in Nevada. When he found that out, he decided to not change his looks because even though, in truth he was the homeliest man in Nevada, he was loved by who he claimed was the most beautiful girl west of the Rockies.

Truth and error were all around those who John was writing to. There were so many who would claim they were Christians, thinking that it might be good for their lives but truth be told, they were Christians in name only. John was warning those he was writing to, to be investigators when it comes to trusting in people especially who they say they are.

If you were to ask people if they were Christians or not, what would be their likely response? Then again, these days, maybe they wouldn't respond with their thought

that they were Christians. You would think they would respond they were Christians even today but as we think about it, those days may be coming to an end with all that is going on around us.

We still might get an affirmative answer to our question but would that positive answer be from a spirit of truth or of error.

Even though we have churches all over town. What if everyone in town attend church regularly as a person claiming to be a Christian should be involved with other Christians, especially on a Sunday morning as we expect they would? What if all those who claimed to be Christians, even in this town came to a church near them? The churches in this town wouldn't be able to hold them all.

Yet how much room do we have here this morning? What if each of you found a person who claimed to be Christian but were found to be a spirit of error? Might you, one with the spirit of truth be able to use the truth and give witness to that truth? Why would you? It is because of love, the love that the Lord has shown you. Yes, as John writes, God loved you so much that He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Propitiation, I'm sure you use that word daily, even if you have a hard time even pronouncing that word. Merriam Webster defines propitiate as: to gain or regain the favor of. Whose favor did Jesus regain for us? We know it is God the Father's favor. We know it was sin that caused the rift between God and His ultimate creation, man. Yes, in the early days of creation, man, Adam and Eve decided they could be their own gods and choose to do what they wanted. What they thought would be better for them as who should have a better idea what was best for themselves, other than themselves? So they chose what God said they shouldn't and they paid the price. They weren't the only ones to pay the price for the Triune God paid a greater price as Jesus had to go to the cross to suffer there for all sin, past, present and future.

We know that love. We know the truth. We have He is very Word. Most of us have grown up with the Word, with that Love for us.

We have it but there are so many who don't. Oh, the devil has deceived them in many ways. The devil has talked about love and the fact that God loves us as is written in the Gospel that John wrote. They may even be able to quote John 3:16, For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

Being able to quote that verse does not make a person Christian, neither does trusting in the promise without knowing that it was only through Jesus dying for and paying for their sins does the love of God count for them for they reject that Jesus is the only way for their sins to be paid for, for He is the only one who could make propitiation for the sins of the world.

How are you going to know if they are only trusting in the love of God and not in Jesus? Yes, God loves everyone, that is why He sent Jesus to come to live here in the world He created. However, as you know sin wasn't there in the beginning, it wasn't created by Him but was the choice of man. Mankind has been making choices ever since and it is always seems to be for error, for evil, for sin.

When we are learning about the truth or error of others, we know we too have chosen error, chosen sin and are, as we said earlier, **I , a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities . . .** Yes, we are sinners who need what Jesus, not some god out there, we need what God who came down from heaven to be man did for us because of His love for us. God's love is made manifest in those whom He lives. Yes, He loved the whole world and yet that love is fulfilled only in Jesus who went to that cross, showing His love for all and yet as every gift, t has to be received in order for that gift to be known.

We know there is no way to come to faith on our own, we need the Holy Spirit to create faith in us as He did by instilling faith in us through the water and the Word. We know all this but as was said earlier, so many others don't. We know the passage from John where Jesus said, John 15:13 *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

Friends. We know people who are our friends and if we have been friends awhile, we know if they are believers or not or at least we should. So, what about those we don't know? How long have you known your "friends"? Who were they before they were friends? Maybe some you didn't know. They could have been an enemy and yet things worked out to where you became friends.

So how many more friends can you stand? If you aren't in search of some more friends then I guess you can't stand any more. If you can't stand anymore, then you must think that your best friend, Jesus, is OK with you and wouldn't want you to strain yourself to go out and find some more friends. Maybe it is because you might have to die to yourselves? But that is love, the love of God for you that you are to show others.

It was the love of God that brought Jesus to earth and had Him go to that cross for you and I and the whole world. Yes, the agape love. The love that expects nothing in return. He loves just because He can and wants to. He loves because we are His own workmanship, He created us.

We know there are other types of love as we know that Philadelphia is called the city of brotherly love as the name Philadelphia is the love we might call brotherly love in the Greek. You may have heard there is another love. It is the love that is usually found around other gods. That is the love that so many equate with the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit but that is not the love He touts as the love that lays down its life for a friend. No the love so many want to associate with the love they are wanting the Lord to bless is eros, the erotic love.

That is to be reserved for husband and wife and not to any other made up relationship that mankind seems to come up with. Oh but they love each other, who are we to tell them it isn't right. What goes on between two adults shouldn't make any problem for us but when that relationship is touted as marriage a relationship between a man and a woman, put in place by God, then the line has been crossed.

That love is not the love the Lord would have us have for others. It is the agape love that we are to have, the love He loved us with even though He created the other loves to be used in the right context. Yes, the Greek has different words for the one word we use, love. Don't know why we don't have other words but since we don't we may have to explain the love the Lord is talking about.

Love, there may be three words for it in the Greek but the one we have in the text for today was the one the Lord used to love us. He loves us even though we don't deserve it. He love us when we were His still His enemies before He made us His own through the water and the Word.

Since He has loved us, we should follow His example with others He has placed in our lives. We should show His love to them, the love that saved us and wants to save the rest of the world.

The world is so big so why not pick one or two, to start with. Pray that the Lord would provide a chance to show His agape love to them. Love, without expecting anything in return so that they can see this love is something different, something more than they are used to. God loved us so we ought to love one another.