

1 John 3:16–24: <sup>16</sup>By this we know love, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. <sup>17</sup>But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? <sup>18</sup>Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

<sup>19</sup>By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; <sup>20</sup>for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup>Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; <sup>22</sup>and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. <sup>23</sup>And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup>Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

### 100 Years of Abiding in Christ's Love

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The text for today's message is the Epistle reading from 1st John, chapter 3, verse 23:

<sup>23</sup>And this is [God's] commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

#### Introduction

Do you know what “love” is? We love our pets; we love food; we love family; we love baseball; we love the movies. But not all of these types of love mean the same thing. Hopefully, you don't love pizza the same way you love your family.

The ancient Greeks recognized four different kinds of love, so they had four different words for love: The first kind of love is Eros (ἔρως). Eros is romantic love or sexual desire. Eros is just about the only kind of love Hollywood recognizes. That's the kind of love that supposedly wins in our culture today.

The second kind of love is Philia (φιλία). Philia is the love between friends that we call brotherly love—hence the name, Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. Another word for this kind of love is “platonic love.”

The third kind of love is Storge (στοργή). Storge is the natural affection between members of the same family—parents and children; brothers and sisters. This love is deeper than platonic—it’s the blood is thicker than water kind of love.

The fourth kind of love is Agape (ἀγάπη). Agape is the greatest love of all. It’s defined as divine, unconditioned, sacrificial love—a love that seeks only the benefit of the beloved. Unlike the other types of love, Agape love gives without expecting anything in return.

The apostle John tells us what kind of love God has for His creation in the opening words of our text: “<sup>16</sup>By this we know love—agape love—, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” This is love: that God gave His only-begotten Son into death on the cross to pay for your sins. There on a hill outside Jerusalem God placed the sins of the world—and His wrath—on Jesus, so we may have forgiveness of sins and a renewed life with God—this is the very definition of Agape love!

But where do you find God’s love today? Shortly after I left Kimball for senior college, one of the hit songs on the Country charts was, “Looking for love in all the wrong places,” from the movie, Urban Cowboy. I know people who look for God’s love in a lot of the wrong places. They look for God’s love in a child’s eyes, or in a starry night; they look for God’s love in a quiet fishing hole, or in some kind of “emotional” experience.

But God’s saving and sacrificial love is found in only one place today: Where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is truthfully proclaimed, and His Sacraments are rightly administered. That means

God's saving and sacrificial love is found right here in this place, in this Divine Service, where the Holy Spirit has called and gathered this people into a Christian congregation.

TODAY IS A CELEBRATION BECAUSE GOD HAS GRACIOUSLY MADE ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH TO BE A PLACE WHERE CHRIST'S LOVE ABIDES AMONG HIS PEOPLE IN WORD AND SACRAMENT, AND WHERE CHRIST'S LOVE ABIDES IN THIS COMMUNITY THROUGH THE WORDS AND DEEDS OF HIS PEOPLE.

I. The Love of God abides in Temple; Christ; Church; Christian.

A: The Temple—In the Old Testament, the Temple was the abode of God, so it was also then, the abode of His grace and love. In today's Old Testament reading, Solomon asks the Lord to reveal His grace and love when people come to Him in prayer: "O LORD my God ... listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive."

As a place of forgiveness, the Temple was the place where God's love abided. In Old Testament times, if you wanted to be in God's gracious presence and receive the forgiveness of your sins, you had to journey to the Temple.

B: The Christ—But with the incarnation of Jesus, the abode of God's love changed. John writes in his Gospel that the Word—Christ Himself—became flesh and dwelt among us. In Greek, that word dwelt actually means tented or tabernacled. Literally, John 1:14 says, The Word became flesh and tabernacled with us. During His earthly ministry, God's love was revealed in the person and work of Jesus. For help, healing, mercy, and forgiveness, people went to Jesus.

As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus is the face of God's love. In Christ, God's love for sinners was fully revealed, most especially on the cross. Returning to the opening words of our text: "16By this we know love, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us."

C: The Church—When Jesus ascended into heaven, He didn't take the love and grace of God with Him. He empowered His disciples to proclaim the Gospel, teach the Faith establish churches, and forgive sins. Today, the holy, Christian, and apostolic Church is the abode of Christ's love—the place where God's people abide in Christ's love through His Word and Sacraments. Many churches have processions for the reading of the Holy Gospel. The pastor and his assistants process to the center of the nave where the Gospel is read. Such an act symbolizes the very real presence of the incarnate Christ among His people in His Word.

Now, a church—faithful in Word and Sacrament—is where God's love abides, but what is Church? This building is God's house. This structure has been provided through God's benevolence and by the sacrificial generosity of church members. This building is a blessing from God, where God's people assemble to receive His gifts.

But a church is more than a building. You're not celebrating the 100th anniversary of this building, you're celebrating the 100th anniversary of this congregation. It is in this people—called and gathered, washed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit—where the love of Christ has abided for 100 years.

Here is where Christ's love abides in His Word and Sacrament. Here is where God's Word is rightly divided into Law and Gospel. Here is where souls are saved in the waters of Holy Baptism, and where sins are forgiven and faith is strengthened in the body and blood of Jesus. And here is where the saints are equipped for the work of sharing God's love.

D: The Christian's Heart—Would you agree: Where Christ is, there is His Love? In baptism, you are in Christ and Christ is in you—that means that the heart of every baptized believer is the abode of Christ's love. The apostle Paul explains in Ephesians (Eph. 3:14-19): “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

God's love abides in this world through His people. Because Christ dwells in your hearts through faith, you are the light on a hill that shines as a beacon of God's love in a sin-darkened world.

## II. The Love of God abides in word and deed.

But what good is a lamp if you plug it in and it doesn't work? Electricity flows into it—but nothing happens. The sacrificial love of God doesn't stop in the Christian's heart—it must come forth in deed and in truth. That is God's commandment: <sup>23</sup>And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup>Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

The One who abides in Christ's love is called to live in that love—not just in Church, but out there in the world—in deed and in truth. But that's not easy—the sinful nature, the world, and the devil—they all put up barriers to God's love. First, this evil triumvirate wants to keep you from abiding in Christ's love by tempting you to think that you don't need church, or you

don't need God's Word. Once they divide you from the truth of God's Word, they entice you with the lies of this dying culture. And once enticed, your love for God and neighbor grows cold like a dead lamp.

As sinners we fail to love genuinely—fail to show mercy, answer truthfully, sacrifice fully or suffer for our Savior—and our rightly informed conscience lets us know it. The heart or conscience of the believer knows when we haven't loved as we ought—and condemns us. John writes in our text: “<sup>19</sup>By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; <sup>20</sup>for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”

But know this: God is greater than your heart. God is kinder to you and more merciful to you than your own conscience. When your conscience aches because you haven't loved as Christ loved you, the Holy Spirit beseeches you to go where Christ's love is found—in Church—in the Divine Service—in Word and Sacrament—in the community of believers where Christ's love and forgiveness abides. Here, the absolution is given, your sins are forgiven—your heart is reassured—and your faith is strengthened.

Jesus shed His blood to forgive you and win you for God. And in forgiveness, you truly know the love, grace and mercy of God—and the automatic response of the heart in which the love of Christ abides is to love in deed and in truth. Take Zacchaeus for example in the Gospel reading. The love of Christ that came to dwell in the heart of Zacchaeus couldn't be contained. In gratitude for Christ's love and mercy, Zacchaeus was compelled by the Holy Spirit to love and show mercy to his neighbor!

Though we fail to love sacrificially in word and deed, God does not fail: <sup>21</sup>Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; <sup>22</sup>and whatever we ask we receive

from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. <sup>23</sup>And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

The commandment is to believe and love—and God always gives to those who ask for a stronger faith and a greater love—that is His promise. Through His Holy Spirit, God empowers you to abide in Christ’s love both in faith—your relationship with Christ—and in and in deed and truth—your relationship with the world.

God knows you abide in Christ’s love by the faith He sees in your heart—by that faith you are justified and saved. But the world knows you abide in Christ’s love by your genuine acts of love and the truthfulness of your words.

## Conclusion

Do Christians love perfectly? No, I have yet to meet one who does. Although I did meet a man on an evangelism call who claimed he hadn’t sinned since his conversion, 40 years earlier. So of course, the man didn’t need church. But when I asked him if that meant he didn’t need Jesus, he threw me out of his house!

Jesus shows God’s love by entering this world to seek and save sinners—that’s Agape love—the greatest love of all. And that’s the love that abides at St. John’s Lutheran Church. You see, this church isn’t a museum for saints, it’s a hospital for sinners—and sinners need God’s mercy. In this spiritual hospital, the medicine of eternal life has been administered from the font, the pulpit and the altar. Here, God has mercy on His people, and here, Christ’s love abides in His people.

And for 100 years, the people of St. John's Lutheran Church, who abide in Christ's love, have carried the love into their community in word and in deed. May God bless you with many, many more years of abiding in Christ's love!

In the name of Jesus. Amen.