

The Seventh Sunday Of Easter
May 20, 2012
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

1 John 4:13-21

We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Jack Kelley, a former foreign affairs editor for *USA Today* and a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize in 2002, wrote this story. *"Over in East Africa at the capital of Somalia during a famine, it got so bad we walked into one village where almost everyone was dead. We saw this little boy. You could tell he had worms and was severely malnourished as his skin was wrinkled as though he was 100 years old. Our photographer had a grapefruit, which he gave to the boy. The boy was so weak he didn't have the strength to hold the grapefruit, so we cut it in half and gave it to him. He picked it up, looked at us as if to say thanks, and began to walk. We walked behind him in a way that he couldn't see us. He walked over to a little boy on the ground who I thought was dead. His eyes were completely glazed over. It turned out this was his younger brother. The older brother kneeled down next to his younger brother, bit off a piece of the grapefruit and chewed it. He then opened his younger brother's mouth, put the grapefruit in, and worked his brother's jaw up and down. We learned that the older brother had been doing that for the younger brother for two weeks. A couple days later the older brother died of malnutrition, and the younger brother lived."*

That is what I would call a story about sacrifice, a story of really loving your brother, a story of love. In this world people crave true love stories. Movies like the *The Notebook* and more recently *The Vow* try to open our eyes to what true love looks like and is really all about. But, my Christian friends, we don't have to go to the movies or to Somalia to find true love. We have come to know by faith the greatest love story ever told. We have a God who loved us before this world began, a God who planned and carried out our salvation, a Savior God who opened for us the very gate to heaven. In fact, God is love. He is the one true source of all love. So the apostle John states this simple yet essential truth we will consider today and I pray always keep in mind when it comes to true and real love: ***We love because He first loved us.***

It is very clear that love is the key concept in this letter. John uses the word love 14 times in these verses before us. It is also used 13 times in the previous six verses and 5 more times in the next three verses. The Greek word John uses each time is the word

agape, which describes an unconditional, committed, self-sacrificing love. We are also to be clear on where this kind of love starts. We did not love God and then God loved us – it is always the other way around. God first loved us. And for the last six months or so this kind of love has been our focus here at church hasn't it? This love has been evident throughout what we call the festival half of the church year. We have indeed once again witnessed the greatest love story ever told.

It is a story that started in a wooden manger as our God was laid as an infant into a feed box for animals and it would continue all the way to a wooden tree where our God as true man would be nailed hands and feet to a cross. The story includes Jesus leaving heaven to come to earth, taking upon Himself our guilt and sin and providing us holiness, giving up His life to save us from death, and suffering the depths of hell so we can have heaven. This is the story of Jesus being our Savior by living for sinners and dying for sinners. John writes: ***“We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.”*** The best part about this love story is that it doesn't end with some tragic death, but instead the story tells of a triumph on the third day, of a living Savior and an empty grave. It is a love story with ongoing results. John confesses: ***“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.”*** More literally these words say ***“And so we have known and still know and we have relied and continue to rely on and believe the love God has for us.”*** ***God is love.***

Because God is love and He loved us by sending Jesus, His Son, to be our Savior: ***“we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love.”*** The NIV translation leaves this word love kind of generic when it comes to whose love is talked about which gives us such confidence to face God on Judgment Day, but the Greek is much more clear. It is God's love for us. That is why there is no fear – because of God's perfect love for us in Christ. Imagine if we had to stand before God on the basis of our love for Him and others. It would be much worse than an Olympic athlete or dance contestant waiting for the Judges verdict to see if they scored high enough to win the event. A Holy God expects, no actually demands, perfect tens every time. And you and I know that we have not loved the Lord with all our hearts and all our souls, and all our minds. You and I know we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We may be ashamed to admit the truth that we do not even love those closest to us the way we should. We would be standing on very shaky ground if our confidence was in our love.

So again the order of this love is everything. God's love for me is not dependant upon my love for Him. My love in no way comes first. ***“We love because he first loved us.”*** Isn't baptism a wonderful reminder of this? Think of what God did in love this morning for Lucius Alan. He clothed this little boy in Jesus' robes of righteousness. The Father in heaven, through water and the Word, wrapped His arms of love around Lucius and now calls him His own dear child. God washed all his sins away. He gave Lucius the gift of His Spirit so that Luke can know Jesus by faith. God's love did the same for all of us.

Because God loves us, we love. ***“We love because he first loved us.”*** By faith we have been plugged into the eternal source of love. Since God gives us unlimited forgiveness, we forgive those who sin against us. Since God shows us ultimate kindness and gentleness we want to be kind to and gentle with others. Since God loves us, we cannot help but love others because God lives in us. John writes: ***If anyone says, “I love***

God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” God’s love will always affect our relationships with others. Because of God’s love we strive to love our spouse, our children, our parents, our fellow believers, even our enemies. That is what the greatest story of love does to us – it motivates and teaches us to love with a committed, unconditional, self-sacrificing love.

Go back to that beautiful story of how that older brother sacrificed for his younger brother so that his brother could live even though he died. I would call that a story of love. I am not saying whether this story is completely true or false but I looked up Jack Kelly and the reason he is a former editor for the *USA Today* is he resigned after being investigated for fabricating the truth in many of his stories. Again I am not saying this story was or wasn’t one in which he stretched the truth. But we have a true, real love story that needs no fabricating because God’s Word is truth. We do not have to stretch any limits when it comes to God’s love for us for Jesus stretched out His arms on a cross and died that we might live. That’s love. That’s agape. I pray we never tire of hearing or telling this love story. I pray we never reverse the correct order as John so simply explains: ***“We love because he first loved us.”*** Amen.