

LOVING THROUGH WORDS AND DEEDS

1 John 3:16-24

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/loving-through-words-and-deeds/>

Has this every happened in your home? One child runs in the house from playing outside and declares "Mom, brother's calling me names. That idiot just called me stupid." Yes, love is not always easy, is it? Whenever I read a Bible passage, I like to ask, "Why is this included in our sacred text? What made it necessary?" It's likely that when this first letter of John was written, the original apostles were dying off and some of the fire had gone out of the early Christ followers, some of their zeal about the Risen Christ had begun to drain away. They started bickering, and turning inward, taking care of themselves, not others.

Eugene Peterson has written that anyone who joins church expecting to find a harmonious group who have their act together is in for a disappointment—and they probably haven't read the New Testament! [*Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, p. 311].

JOHN SHOWS US LOVE'S EXAMPLE—v. 16. Sadly, both culture and church have bungled the concept of love. Culture has reduced love to an emotion. The church's mutation of love is making it a mental exercise, believing the right things. Love is neither a feeling nor a mental exercise; love is experiential. It is entering the mystery of the Cross. If you want to see what love is, look at Jesus Christ, the Cross. Love is messy and inconvenient (just ask a mother of three children). Love is costly; it hurts. It We give up the right to revenge, the right to think that our hurt is an exception to the command to forgive.

JOHN THEN OFFERS US LOVE'S TEST—v. 17. The phrase "refuse to help" reads in the Greek, "shut the door to your heart..." Do we see people in need—really see them? When I go to the eye doctor, he checks my peripheral vision. "Tell me when you see the pen in my hand." Have you checked your heart's peripheral vision? Our church's? Missiologist Andrew Walls has said that biblical faith has a bias for the periphery, the edges [quoted by David Heim in *Christian Century*, March 28, 2018, p. 25]. Do we?

Sometimes, we just don't see people. Without realizing it, the church becomes organized around ways to prop up the comfortable white, middle class. Without realizing it, we've stopped seeing the periphery, the people who don't fit our demographic. A disabled man who used a power chair once told me, "Strangely, in a crowd, I'm invisible. People don't see me." Do we see people in need? In v. 17, John describes a person "in need," a word meaning to be missing something—missing a relationship with God, lacking a listening ear, a sense of being valued.

JOHN DECLARES LOVE'S CONCRETENESS—v. 18. I didn't realize until this week that the word for "action" or "deed" is "work." It requires energy, moving us out of comfort, doing what does not come naturally.

Where did we get the idea that believing correct doctrine is all there is to following Jesus? According to v. 23, our central commandment is two-fold: The church's central task is to bring people to Christ and train them to love. Think about the announced theme for this year's worship and sermons—"Come see what love can do." And next Sunday's love in action, Mission JC. But isn't it sad that the church going out and doing loving deeds is newsworthy?

What if FBC JC became known as a place of mercy and love? What if you became known as the most loving follower of Jesus anyone had ever met? A person who lives mercy and love, who speaks it and who displays it through deeds?

Late in the first Christian century, tradition has it that just before John the Elder died in Ephesus, he was carried in on a cot. He was asked if he had any last words for the "ekklesia," the church, and he whispered, "Brethren, love one another." Is there anything more? It is enough. It's everything.