

REFLECTIONS



May 2, 2021

1 John 4:16-21

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 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. 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. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

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GOD IS LOVE

by
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This selection from John's first letter is one of the finest descriptions of how our relationship with God and our relationship with one another and the world works: Because God is Love, we are to be love in this world.

In this reading we find that the pervasiveness of God's love does not allow for anything else but loving that which God loves, and God loves all. We know God, not through our intellect, but through the experience of love. "We love God because God first loved us" is precisely how we know and acknowledge God.

If God as light brought about life, God as love nurtures it and makes it meaningful. We all thrive when we feel loved.

Part of what we identify in our liturgies as Mystery of Faith is that God is love. That God deeply cares about life, your life, my life, on this small speck of dust has been demonstrated through the life, death, and resurrection of our brother Jesus. The intense intentionality of God's love as seen in Jesus, begs the question, why?

Why does God love us so much?

Love does not exist in a vacuum. Love requires love returned. Love is the reason God made us in God's image and breathed us to life to become the living souls we are today. God needs us to need God. God loves us so that we love God.

Love makes God sound so vulnerable. Indeed, love makes God vulnerable to our cares and our pain, just as love makes us vulnerable to same. Love like faith and hope is not about certainty, but rather about the willingness to engage and cope with uncertainties of life. The strength of love is not in its being rigid or tough. The strength of love is its endurance, its flexibility to spring back when pushed back, and its immense patience. The strength of love is also in its vulnerability. In fact, love cannot exist unless there is a sense of being susceptible to the feelings and needs of others.

While God's love is immeasurable, God doesn't require much to feel loved. In the Ten Commandments, God only asks for one day out of a week to take a break and take some time to express our love of God as a worshipping community. Taking our personal and communal needs to God is an act of loving God, but what expresses our love for God best is when we love what God loves or as John says loving our brothers and sisters.

What John's letter clarifies is that the opposite of love is not hate, but rather fear. Hate is the result of fear; in that, we tend to hate what we fear. Fear and hatred are not attributes of God. Our fears and our hatreds are not obstacles to God, but they are to us. As the children of God, we need to ask ourselves what is the point of our fears and hatreds?

Fear abounds in our world and where fear abounds hatred abounds. Everything we struggle with in our world is rooted in fear. Perceptively, John writes that our fears are connected to our fear of punishment. John is not talking about fearing God's punishment, but the fact that we punish ourselves by punishing those we fear and then fear being punished in return. Fear begets fear in the one feared and hatred begets hatred in the one being hated. It is a vicious cycle evident in all our struggles of the past and the present.

John points out that perfect love casts out fear. Perfect love is that love which abides in God, and if we abide in God love is being perfected in us. The antidote to our fears is to love what God loves. It has always been love and will it always be love.

We can't change the fears and hatreds of the past, but we don't have to perpetuate them. We have within us the creative power of God's love by which to write a different history moving forward; a power that allows us to move the needle of history from systemic fear to systemic love by abandoning the of script our making in which the plot line always ends in death in order to follow God's original script of love which always leads to life.

Doing so requires a willingness to walk by faith, a willingness to allow room for hope, and a willingness to exercise love for all, not with words but by deeds.

God is love and so let us love God by actively loving all that God loves.

Amen.

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

***Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble swelling, all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.***

(Charles Wesley 1707-1788)