

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, May 10, 2009
Rev. John Tapscott

"GOD IS LOVE"

1 John 4:7-21

On Mother's Day I start off with a piece someone wrote called, "What My Mother Taught Me." My mother taught me religion, "You better pray that will come out of the carpet." My mother taught me authority, "Because I say so, that's why." My mother taught me foresight, "Wear clean underwear in case you're in an accident." My mother taught me how to be a contortionist, "Would you just look at that dirt on the back of your neck?" My mother taught me stamina, "You'll sit there until all that spinach is gone." My mother taught me about medical science, "If you don't stop crossing your eyes, they'll freeze that way." My mother taught me hypocrisy. "If I've told you once I've told you a million times, "Don't exaggerate." My mother taught me about weather, "Your room looks like a tornado went through it." My mother taught me anticipation, "Just wait 'til we get home." My mother taught me patience, "Sure you can do that. As soon as you're 21 and leave the house." My mother taught me to think ahead, "If you don't pass your spelling test, you'll never get a good job." My mom taught me diplomacy, "I don't care who started it. It takes two to fight." My mother taught me about envy, "Millions of underprivileged children in the world don't have wonderful parents like you have." My mother taught me justice, "When you have kids I hope they turn out just like you." But mostly my mother taught me love, "You know that whatever happens or whatever you do, I'll stand behind you because I love you."

Well, most of us did learn about love at our mother's knee. So we thank God for our moms and honour them however we can this day. Now there are no perfect mothers on this earth, or fathers either, but we recognise that they most often did the best they could, especially considering the grief we sometimes gave them.

"God is love". We heard John use this twice in our reading. 1 John 4:7,8 "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God, everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." and v. 16 "God is love and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."

God is love. God's love is the source of love and the model for our love. God

enables us to love. Love is the highest expression of Christian faith because when we love we are sharing in the very nature of God himself.

Now to say God is love sounds abstract. But God's love is not abstract, nor is it a feeling. God's love is seen in his actions. God's love is revealed in what He does for his creation and his creatures. In this passage John points out the nature of God's love.

First, God's love is sacrificial.

John tells us in verse 10, "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." For human sin to be forgiven a sacrifice had to be made. And since nothing we could give was sufficient God himself provided the final, acceptable sacrifice. God sent Jesus to take our place and to pay our sin debt through his own suffering death on the Cross. God gave Jesus and Jesus gave himself for us. And then on Easter Sunday, the power of God's love, the Holy Spirit, raised Jesus from the grave to be alive forevermore. The very nature of God the Holy Trinity is sacrificial, self-giving love that reaches out to seek and to save. In love God gave himself fully and sacrificially to save us from an eternity apart from God, and to save us for a new and eternal relationship with God, which we receive by faith in Christ.

Most of us had mothers and fathers too, who made sacrifices on our behalf. In fact, parenting has to be, to a large degree, all about sacrificial love. It has to involve a willingness to give up some of your own pleasure or ambition or comfort or gain for the sake of your children. You know, when our mothers brought us into the world they made a sacrifice and put themselves at risk. That's why the apostle Paul includes a hope in one of his letters that women will be saved or "kept safe" through childbirth. You remember in the Bible how Jacob's beloved Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin. Now childbirth is less risky now than in previous generations, but it's not risk free, even today.

One of my concerns is that these days y, one generation seems less willing to sacrifice for the sake of the next, and I'm not talking about going to war. There are two disturbing trends that may sink Western civilization and they're not global warming or radical Islam. But both have to do with our loss of sacrifice. One is our low birth rate. We're not reproducing ourselves. Children are often seen as requiring too much sacrifice or too much change in our life-style. The other thing that's going to sink us is debt, not just individual debt, but societal debt, which future generations will be unwilling to pay or not able to pay. We want what we want and we want it now, even if it means burdening future generations. The saga of General Motors is a microcosm for what may happen

to Western civilization - bloated, debt-ridden, 100,000 current employees producing cars for a shrinking customer base, while a million retirees are supported by the whole apparatus. That's unsustainable, and so is our civilization if we don't regain a sense of sacrifice.

Sacrifice is essential for life to thrive - parents making sacrifices for their children; husbands and wives sacrificing for one another; one generation making sacrifices for the next; Christians making sacrifices for the sake of the Gospel and the church. Self-sacrificing love is at the heart of God and must be at the heart of our love, too. "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another..."

So God's love is sacrificial; God's love also judges.

1 John 4:17, "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement." God's love judges.

Now it may seem that love and judgement are incompatible. As I said last week we often hesitate to judge one another, based on Jesus' injunction, "Judge not, lest ye be judged." We say God is a God of love, not a God of judgement. But it's because God is love that he judges. Indeed, only the God of love is the just judge. He judges by the plumb line of his perfect love and all that is not in accord with his loving will be finally overturned and destroyed. Think of it. God created and redeemed the world and each of us in love and for love. And since God is love, how can he allow that which is not love to finally stand. Well, he won't and he doesn't.

Indeed, the Bible tells us that "God has set a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead." So there will be a final day of judgement. But God's loving judgement is going on all the time, even now. It comes to individuals and to the church and to nations. God's judgment is going on all the time. Actions have consequences. The chickens do come home to roost. "What a man sows, so shall he reap." God is constantly at work, judging and overturning that which is not of his nature and will. Slowly yes, often more slowly than we perceive it. God gives people time to repent and turn to him again, but if they harden their hearts and reject him they set themselves up for a great fall. "The mills of God grind slowly, but exceedingly fine."

The almost inevitable downfall of Western civilization will eventually be seen as God's loving judgement on our lack of love, our greed, our rejection of the living God and his ways, our choosing the culture of death rather than the culture

of life. Whatever is not of love, at least sacrificial love as God reveals it and models it for us, the same will be judged and overturned. God's love judges.

But let me end with good news. **God is love and God's love casts out our fear.** V. 18 "There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear."

The Bible identifies one of our biggest problems as fear; fear of the future, fear of the unknown, fear of failure, fear that someone might get ahead of us or get more than us. We fear illness, death, separation, final judgement. We even fear God.

But over and over again the Bible tells us to "Fear not!" "Don't be afraid!" 365 times actually, one for each day of the year. "Fear not." I mean there are good reasons for us to be afraid, but God's perfect love casts out our fear. In love God has taken our final judgement upon himself in Christ, so that all of us who trust in Christ will be kept safe on the last day and brought to everlasting life. We will not be lost or cast out. John says that "fear has to do with punishment, but perfect love casts out fear, so we may have confidence or boldness on the day of judgement." Trusting in Christ who is God's perfect love made flesh, we need not fear any power, because no one can take us from the Father's hand. We are not perfect yet, not by any means, but we are perfectly loved. As we allow ourselves to dwell in God's perfect love and grace, our fears flee away before the face of Jesus Christ.

Isn't that the kind of love that we want to model as husbands and wives and parents? I don't want my home to be governed by fear, but by love. When my wife and daughter hear me walk through the door in the evening, I would be so saddened if I thought that what they feel is fear. I guess you'll have to ask them, but I hope it's not so and I don't want it to be so. Who wants a relationship with someone based on fear? Not me for sure, and so I try to love them in such a way that they don't have to be afraid. What overcomes fear between humans is love. And our human love is but a pale reflection of the perfect love of God, love shown when he sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." That's what God's love does for us. God's perfect love in Jesus Christ casts out our fear. "Beloved, since God loved us so much, let us also love one another."

