

Manifest in Us

By Linda Rex

April 28, 2024, 5th Sunday / Easter—Do you know what love looks like? Do you know what it feels like to be loved with self-giving, sacrificial, other-centered love?

According to the apostle John, we should be experiencing this kind of love when we encounter those who profess to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is especially true in our covenant relationships, small group gatherings, and spiritual communities. In our New Testament passage for this Sunday, 1 John 4:7–21, the apostle explains how he and those who shared in his apostolic ministry had personally seen and experienced this kind of love in the person of Jesus Christ. As God in human flesh, Jesus personified this love which is particularly found within the Father, Son, Spirit Triune fellowship.

Apart from our participation in Christ, we are unable to love one another in this way. No, it is not until we receive God's love as a gift, that we are able to offer other-centered, sacrificial, self-giving love to others. John stresses the importance of loving one another, that in doing so, we will show those around us who God is as love. We become living testimonies of the love of God poured out in us and for us in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. The abiding of God in us, and therefore, us abiding in God, is an essential part of our being able to love others in a way that is a true reflection of the divine love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The gospel reading for this Sunday, John 15:1–8, is where Jesus uses the image of a vine, its branches, and a vinedresser, to talk about our direct connection with himself in the Spirit. Abiding, then, becomes more than just staying in one place. Rather, we find it is a dynamic state of rest (if that possible) in which we as believers are always drawing upon the source of our being, in Christ, and are always growing into the fullness of what we were meant to be, in Christ, coming to the place where we blossom and produce fruit which will last. This drawing from and pouring out is a way of being which reflects the inner relations of the Father, Son, Spirit fellowship, where each pours into and receives from the other, overflowing love.

When we look at our fellowship with one another, especially within the body of Christ, the Church as a whole, we don't often see or experience this type of pouring into and receiving from that reflects the divine love and life. In the Triune life and love, there is authenticity, transparency, truth, purity, affection, kindness, giving—all things which too often, we are missing in our interactions with one another. The result of not living true to our design to be image-bearers of God in Christ is fear, the dread of punishment. This fear, which isolates us and damages our relationships, is a kind of punishment in itself, for it blinds us to the reality of the love poured out for us in Christ, which frees us from such fear.

As the body of Christ, we want to be living out the truth of who we are as those made in the image of God to reflect his likeness. In order for us to love God and love others, which we cannot do on our own, we need to receive first the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the heavenly Spirit. We need to attend to Jesus Christ, all he has done for us in his incarnation, his life, his death, resurrection, and ascension. In Christ, we see our heavenly Father and his great love. As the apostle John shows us, the whole Trinity is involved in our salvation—God is love and loves each and every one of us profoundly. Making the effort to focus on this love, to sit at Jesus' feet as Mary did and learn of him, is one way in which we open ourselves up to God's love.

Gathering with others who are believers to worship, pray, serve, give, help, study the Word of God, hear and share the gospel, opens us up so the Holy Spirit can begin to pour God's love into us. We understand that humans are broken and not every fellowship recognizes what it means to

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participate in Christ's life and love in this way. But as we allow the Spirit to lead us, we will find others who are abiding in Christ, and together we can grow into a fellowship where God's love finds full expression.

Dear Father, Jesus, Spirit, thank you for loving us so profoundly and unselfishly. Thank you for living in us and with us. Grant us the grace to see, recognize, and receive your love. And in receiving your great love, grant us the grace to love others in the same way as you have loved us, through Jesus and by your Spirit, for your glory, Father. Amen.

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.” 1 John 4:7–21 NASB

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.” John 15:1–8 NASB

Recommended reading: *What if Jesus Meets Us in the Good, Bad, and Messy?* by Greg Williams and Mark Mounts [Grace Communion International publication].