

**7th Sunday of Easter  
1 John 4:13-21  
Sermon # 689  
May 17, 2015  
Erich Jonathan Hoeft**

**<sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. <sup>16</sup> So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. <sup>17</sup> By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.**

In Christ Jesus, God's Son our Savior, dear fellow redeemed,

Just after God delivered the Israelites from the hands of the Egyptians, Moses worshiped the LORD saying, **"In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling"** (Exodus 15:13). Have you ever considered just how much the people of Israel needed the Lord in their wilderness wanderings? Two million people spent forty years in desert conditions. Every time the people pitched their tents, they needed a campground two-thirds the size of Rhode Island. It's estimated that the Israelites would have required more than 3,000 tons of food a day. In modern shipping terms, it would take a freight train four miles long to move that many rations, and that doesn't begin to address the people's need for water or for clothes. Of course, there were no trains, no supermarkets, and no department stores. The people had to rely on God and his love alone for their survival every minute of their journey. What a miraculous feat on the part of our LORD, bringing so many souls to the Land of Promise. Of course, that miracle is nothing compared to the one that God performs on our behalf, the miracle that will see us through this desert of sin all the way to the heavenly Promised Land. Friends, we must and we can

RELY ON GOD'S LOVE:

- 1) to keep us in Christ,
- 2) to remove our fears, and
- 3) to make us loving.

Well into his 90s, St. John writes to us as one whose heavenward walk is nearly complete. He is confident that he will soon be with Christ. John's confidence came not from anything that he was doing for God, but rather from what God was doing for him. Because John's God is our God, his confidence can be ours too. In fact, that's why John is writing to us, to give us heavenly confidence. He says, **"<sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. "**

John is describing the intimate relationship that exists between God and us, a relationship that fills our life experiences. But what we may sometimes forget is how this relationship came about. So John reminds us: it is all God's doing. It had to be; remember, God found us dead in our sins. Oh, I know, we'd like to remember it differently. We'd like to say that for our part, it was love at first sight. We saw God and just knew that we had to make him ours. But that's not the way it was. Truth be known, and it must be, we wanted nothing to do with God the first time he came to us. We actually hated him. Left to ourselves, we would have sent God packing, telling him to take his love and his forgiveness with him. So blind were we, that we couldn't see salvation knocking at the door, and even if we could have, we hadn't the spiritual sense or power to open that door.

Thank God for his grace-for love that didn't wait for an invitation or even a cry for help. God just went to work. First he sent his Son to save the whole world, including you and me, from sin's damning curse. Then he sent someone to tell us this Good News-a pastor at our baptism, a friend at work, a next door neighbor, and as that person was speaking about the love of Jesus, God went to work again, this time it was the Holy Spirit, who took that message and steered it straight for our hearts. In a miracle of mercy, the Spirit made living, loving, believers out of us dead, God-hating sinners.

And yet, doubts still linger: "How can I be sure I'm really part of the family of God? What if I just want all this so badly that I've fooled myself into thinking it's mine?" Friends, don't you see, that can't happen. John says, **"<sup>15</sup> Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. <sup>16</sup> So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."** The faith you have is not a figment of your imagination, nor is it a spiritual accident. It is the result of God's careful planning and deliberate actions. Your desire to be a follower of Jesus is proof positive that God already lives in you. As one who hated God by nature, you couldn't produce that desire in yourself. It's the work of God's indwelling Spirit. So why the doubts? Perhaps the problem has been that you're trying to find some way to measure your faith. Stop trying! It cannot be done. John knows it, so rather than having us focus on our faith, he directs our attention to the One who gives faith. John doesn't say, "Listen up everyone! We're all relying on faith here. You better have enough of it to get yourself to heaven!" No! He says, **"We... believe the love that God has for us."** Oh, but what if God should run out of love? What if he doesn't have enough to keep us his people? Could that happen? No way. Love isn't a thing that God possesses in limited quantities. John says, **"God is love."** Just as God is infinite, filling everything in every way (Ephesians 1:23), so is his love. God's love for you is endless! You can rely on it to keep you in Christ. God wants you to!

Did you realize that? God doesn't want you living in fear. John says, **"<sup>17</sup> By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love."** God's love has a mission to complete. It wants to drive all fear out of our hearts. Fear of what? Fear of God's punishment now and on Judgment Day. Be honest, you have some fears about Judgment Day, don't you? How are you dealing with them? If you're like me, you're telling yourself, "I've got some time yet before the judgment." Friends, we can't be sure that's true, but even if it is, how will time help alleviate our fear? Well, what if we use that time to please God? What if we do a better job of loving the people around

us? That'll give God a little less to punish us for, right? But how much less? In other words, how well do we have to love before all our fear can be gone? John tells us, "...**perfect love casts out fear.**" So if you think of love as an Olympic event, and our whole life as the contest, we need the Judge to score us a perfect 10.0, or it means eternal death for us in hell. Where's your fear level at now? We never come close to loving anyone perfectly, let alone everyone. We don't stand a chance with the Judge, not if we're going to rely on ourselves.

But John isn't talking about our love in these verses. He's urging us to rely on God's love to remove our fears. Our love is not perfect, but God's love for us is perfect. In his perfect love, God makes us a beautiful promise here. Do you see it? God promises that as far as his judgment is concerned, we, his people living in this world, are just like his Son, Jesus! God can see us in no other way. After all, God sent Jesus here to be our Substitute in love. Jesus showed nothing but perfect love to everyone, love that carried him all the way to the cross to cancel the sin-debt of all people. Now God gives us the credit for all Christ's perfect love, and at the same time, considers the sacrifice that love made for us, as payment in full for all of our lovelessness, all of our selfishness, all of our hatred, all of our sin. There isn't any punishment left for us to face. Jesus suffered it all. By doing so he's removed the cause of all our fear. And with fear gone, all that remains is confidence, confidence that here on earth, God will make all things serve our greatest good, and confidence that when our lives here are over, God will welcome you and me into heaven with the same kind of reception he gave Jesus on the day of his Ascension.

God's love for us changes everything. It changes our status from sinner to saint. That's not all. God's love changes us. That love reaches inside of us to the core of our very being and compels us to live, no longer for ourselves, but for him who died for us and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:14). John says it so simply, "<sup>19</sup>**We love because he first loved us.**" This is a fact. Hearts that have been rescued by the blood of Christ, now beat with gratefulness for him. How can we not love the one who gave up everything for us? And not only do we love him, but we also love everything and everyone that he loves. What if we don't? John says: "<sup>20</sup>**If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his**

**brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."**

What a lesson in love-God's kind of love. Remember, when the Bible talks about God's love for us, it's not talking about an emotion. It's talking about a decision made in God's mind, and an action that God takes on our behalf. Study the passages that talk about God's love for us. They're not about feelings; there about actions God chose to take for us. **"God so love the world that he gave his one and only Son..."** (John 3:16). Or here in our text where John says that God **"has given us of his Spirit...has sent his Son to be the Savior..."** So when God tells us to show love to others, even to our enemies, he's not commanding us to develop feelings of love for these people. Not at all. He's talking about the things we can do for others out of thanks to Christ who gave himself, not only for us, but for all the people he wants us to love.

Put another way: godly love is the willingness to inconvenience yourself for someone else's good. It's the willingness to pray for someone who has been less than kind to you. It's the willingness to put the needs of your spouse, and your children, and your friends, and even strangers before your own needs. Love is the willingness to listen to someone's troubles when that's the last thing you want to be doing. Do you get the idea? Ultimately, godly love is the willingness to let someone else know the Savior's love through the words you speak about him and the things you do to reflect his grace.

If all this talk of love has you hanging your head in shame over millions of past failures, know this: Christ has taken your shame away. Your sins are forgiven. This is a new day that the Lord has made, rejoice and be glad in it. Your slate is clean. You have no past except the Savior's. You get to start over. This means that you can rely on Christ's forgiving love to make you loving today. The same will be true tomorrow, and the day after that, and every day, till God's love has reached its goal and we are safe with him; for Jesus' sake. Amen.