

Text: 1 John 4.7-21
St Stephen's

Sept 17/18, 2006
Sat/Sun

Compelling Love

Our Purposes here at St Stephens..
4 Weeks on Fellowship...

"God is love." 1 Jn 4:8, 16

When John wrote these words, they broke on the ancient world like a hurricane. No one had ever said anything like that before, and no one says anything like that today. Now of course many religions attribute loving actions to their gods. But no one had ever said that God is **fundamentally, essentially, love**.

You might remember St **Augustine's picture of the Trinity** that I shared with you sometime back... The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father, and this Holy Spirit river of love rushes like a living torrent back and forth between them.

I don't think you can **understand what God wants to do in your fellowship circles** until you come to grips with what John is saying – that God is love, essentially, at his core – love.

I know someone who has **a password for their computer**: "Love" Their "Hint Question": "What I am looking for..." So is everyone else!

But **what is it we are looking for?** Love is a word we use for so many different things. **What are some of the things you love?**

I love my wife, I love America, I love bike rides and coffee and the Bible and hamburgers. I love the church. A patriot will say she loves her country. A drug addict will say he loves getting high. A mom or dad will say they love their children. A greedy man says he loves money. Everyone says they love chocolate!

Haven't you found that what you love can **rule** your life – or **ruin** your life – or **rescue** your life? **It all depends** on **what** you love, **who** you love, and **how** you love. We love so many different things. **So what does love mean?** This chapter in John's 1st letter clears up the confusion, gives God's definition of love.

God's Love Comes through a Person to a Place for a Purpose

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

1 Jn 4:9 (NIV)

Circle the phrase 'God showed his love'. Into our confusion about love, "God shows his love". He reveals it, gives it, uncovers it, and the love he shows is **unlike any other love** the world has seen. It is what John calls, "his love". It is such a radically new kind of love that the writers of the New Testament have to find **a new word** for it.

The word here for love is "**Agape**". Before the New Testament was written almost no one used this word for love. But it is all over the New Testament. In our **14 vv** today, the word appears **29X**. God has 'agaped' us and God 'is agape' and we are the 'agapoi'! And we agape each other because he has agaped us! And this agape love overwhelms us and transforms us.

It means "**gift love**", "grace love" –undeserved, unearned, freely given.

And John is saying that this radically new love **comes through a very special person** – God's Son. If you want to see this love and get in on this love, **look at Jesus**. Look at what he did and how he lived, and look at what a difference that can make.

It comes to a very **special place** - look at the phrase – "*into the*

world” – God’s agape love isn’t some amorphous sentiment from a far away God who waves at us from the safety of a distant throne and says, “I love you...” – it **invades** every part of our world and our lives through Jesus. It **penetrates** and **infects** and **pushes** and presses. It is compelling.

And it is always connected to **a purpose** – to bring us life. Forever life.

Now I want to say to you again and again during these weeks that our **fellowship groups are laboratories for this agape love**. Places where we learn that God’s Love Comes through a Person to a Place for a Purpose

You are never going to experience this kind of love trying to do the **Christian faith by yourself**. Actually you **can’t** do the Christian faith by yourself. Because **God is love. God doesn’t do it by himself**. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. And he made you because God is love – **to get you in on that love**. He created you for community. When God calls you to Jesus he calls you to Jesus’ people because he calls you to love. Sign up outside or use a communication card and jump in.

Let’s take some quick notes on this love, on how God shows it, and on how we live it. Start with vs. 10

Christ’s Love Seeks and Saves Us

John makes an important point here, and that is that if you want to understand God’s agape love, don’t look at how we love God, but at how he loves us.

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.

1 Jn 4:10 (RSV)

What he is saying is that **God’s agape love doesn’t sit back** and wait for people to come crawling to him. It doesn’t fold it’s

arms saying, "Well when they straighten up and come to grips with their sin and really start to seek me seriously – well maybe then I will cut them some slack." It is **a love that seeks people** out and **pays any cost** to rescue them. It is the love willing to **bear any burden** for the sake of the beloved, even unto death.

It is **the shepherd** going after the sheep that wanders off, **the woman** that drops her responsibilities to look for the lost coin it is **the father** who looks day after day down that road for his lost son looking and longing and running the moment he sees him. God pursues us.

(Rebecca was singing today, "take all my life and nothing less – I offer you my righteousness" – people like her sing songs like that to God because Jesus first sang that song to us. "take all my life and nothing less – I offer you my righteousness")

We love, because he first loved us.

1 Jn 4:19 (RSV)

What John is saying is that God's agape love has changed him. We agape others because God 'agapes' us. **Could your small group be a place** where you go after people who wander away, go out after people who are having a hard time, and throw a party for people who are coming home? A group where we love no matter what the cost, no matter what the burden?

More notes:

Christ's Love Marks and Shapes Us

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. 1 Jn 4:7 (RSV)

Would you **circle** the word, '**beloved**'? Look at it again in vs 11 *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

1 Jn 4:11 (RSV)

The word is literally “*agape’d ones*”. That is what God calls you. You know, **names matter**. My Mom taught me to say “sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt” – but it was whistling in the dark. In a fallen world, **names stick**. They **define** our interior architecture. They **shape** our thoughts. They can **wound** your souls. I can’t tell you how many times in pastoral care we dig down into the lives we live to discover we are living out of an **ancient criticism** someone has placed on us –and now without our even knowing it, it shapes who we are.

When you come to Christ **God renames you**. He calls you **‘beloved’**. It is the **same name** – hold your breath – that the Father uses to address Jesus at his baptism,
“You are my Son; my beloved...” Mk 1:11

What happens on the cross is that **Jesus – the beloved – becomes cursed** – so that **you and I could become beloved**. He becomes **cast out** so that we would be **welcomed in**.

Could your small group be a place where people learn a new name, a new love, an agape love? That name, that love will **rearrange the architecture of your heart** and your soul. And that is what happens in Christian fellowship.

More notes:

Christ’s Love Steadies and Anchors Us

I love the next phrase in verse 16...

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love...

1 Jn 4:16-18 (NIV)

Circle ‘know and rely’. We **know** his agape love because we know his son. And we **rely** on his love. We **lean** on it. We

draw from it. And we live it.

When we **live this love together**, it transforms us and - look at John's phrase here our love is made 'complete', perfected. - *makes us like Jesus in the world.*

Every time someone comes to Jesus for help and hope... he gets 'agaped' "gift loved" - "grace loved"...

It happens

every time we pray or read the Bible -

every time we secretly lean on him through the day -

When we love each other with this agape love, everyone every time we go to church, every time we gather with other Christians, every time our small group meets.

Healing breaks out. We start to learn our new names - '**beloved**'. We know **we are safe** as we live in God's world with God's people, no matter **how dangerous** the world or **how difficult** the people or how **worrisome the circumstances**.

That **eradicates your fear**. Because we are loved with a love that will not stop or quit or give up or fail. Because **God is agape**. Because Jesus has loved us. Because that love is our life.

So we lean on his love. We draw from his love. We share his love with each other in our fellowship. We pray for more of it.

And so we "**must**" love - not just because God says to, but because **agape love invades** every part of our world and our lives and our souls through Jesus. It penetrates and pushes and presses and infects and stirs and compels.

"Let us love one another, for love comes from God."

1 Jn 4:7