

Knowing true Love

1 John 3:11-24

For the first 8 years of our marriage,
Jasmine's parents lived in Hong Kong,
and so we made a number of trips over there in those years.
Hong Kong really is a great city, a global hub, and a shopping mecca!
Anything you might like to buy, you can get it in HK at a really good price!

We used to love going to the night markets over on the Kowloon side of the harbor,
Handbags, suitcases, wallets and watches, all the great brands:
Louis Vuitton, Rolex, Tag Heuer,
I couldn't believe how cheaply we could buy these world famous brands.

So you can imagine my astonishment when a few months later,
the chrome shine started to wear off a watch that I bought for 2 dollars.
"My goodness" I thought as the dark metal poked out from underneath,
"They've sold me a fake!" Well of course they did! Because they're all fakes!
I mean, you can buy the real deal in Hong Kong
but you're not going to find it in the Temple Street markets.
And if I were to pay close attention to what I was buying,
then there were signs that I could have alerted me to what was going on:
The brand name on the face of the watch is slightly crooked,
They've done a dodgy job on the fluorescent paint that should be on hands.
Knowing what to look for could have saved me the pain of wasting 2 dollars!

[It's funny isn't it when you're travelling and shopping in markets,
we start to get all worked up over the smallest amounts of loose change!]

We are continuing in our series looking at the New Testament letters of John,
And John's writing because he wants his readers to know how to spot a fake.
He's aware that false teachers are trying to distribute a false gospel,
and so he's reminding his readers of both the true *content* of the gospel,
and also of the true *marks* or *characteristics* of gospel-believing people.

The true content of the gospel message is Jesus Christ;
that he was God in human form and that he died to purify us from sin,
and the true mark of people who believe this gospel ... *is love*.

This week we listen in as John speaks further about this all-important characteristic.
Love is an easy word to say. Love is an easy concept to aspire to,
but how often do we think about the *specifics* of what's involved?
Do we realize just how horrific the *opposite* of love is?
John wants to ensure we are familiar with Christian love in its details,
and so we begin again with him in 1 John 3:11.
For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

What does John mean by ‘a message from the beginning’?

Well, the command to love was something God always had before his people.

Leviticus 19:18 Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.

Love has always been the expectation, going all the way back into the OT.

And it’s from the OT that John cites the first of two case studies

to help us understand what love is and what love *is not*.

The first example is taken from near the beginning of the whole bible—from Genesis ch 4—and it’s an example of the opposite of love.

1 John 3:12 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother.

You remember the story of Cain and Abel; the first two sons of Adam and Eve.

The two brothers both worked on land; Cain grew crops, Abel kept flocks.

They both came before God to make an offering:

Cain some of his grain, Abel some of his livestock.

And God accepted Abel’s offering, but he rejected Cain’s.

Now why was Cain’s offering rejected?

In Genesis 4 God explains that Cain had allowed sin to get the better of him.

Unlike his brother Abel, Cain was not taking God’s word to him seriously and so God rejected Cain’s attempt to engage with him.

And what effect did this have on Cain?

Cain became angry, and he said to his righteous and God fearing brother

Let’s go out into the field, and getting Abel all alone—*whack!*—he kills him.

Why?!! Why take such drastic and violent action? Why did he murder him?

John explains at the end of v12: Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous.

Cain’s life was one of choosing sin over righteousness,

of choosing life in the darkness over life lived in the light of God,

and it’s been John’s constant testimony that those in darkness hate the light

and will go to great lengths to avoid it or to even snuff it out.

From ch 3 of his Gospel, vs 19 and 20 Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

And so Cain killed his brother Abel, because Darkness. Hates. Light.

I remember sitting in a café with a young man from a previous church

whose wife had just left him for another man.

And he was telling me how within the final stages of his marriage,

his wife has lost interest in Christian things

and was changing her mind about basic Christian doctrines,

not wanting to meet with Christian friends.

He said to me “I don’t understand what happened”.

And so I said “You know, I think it’s an example
of when the Bible speaks about the darkness recoiling from the light,
and ultimately you’re walking in the light and she is choosing darkness.”
That made a lot of sense to him,
and I think it makes a lot of sense of what we see happening in the world
In verse 13 John tells us to not be surprised when the world hates us.
To not be surprised when we hear Christian voices ridiculed in public debate,
Or when we ourselves are mocked for what we believe.

And with the example of Cain and Abel in mind,

John pleads with his readers to not follow the same path of hatred,
verse 14 Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer,
and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.
You remember that in Matthew’s Gospel, Ch 5, in the sermon of the Mount,
Jesus places anger in the same box as murder: You have heard that it was said to
the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to
judgment.’²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject
to judgment.
and John is making the same connection;
that in God’s eyes hatred is just as bad as murdering someone.
I think it’s because both hatred and murder despise the image of God,
When you hate someone you detest a person who,
no matter what you think of them, was created to reflect God.
Murder goes one step further and snuffs that image out.

My own reflection on these verses is to plead with you
to not join the ranks of our Christian enemies by hating one another.
Hatred is a weapon of darkness,
and we each have enough darts to contend with from those on the outside
let alone those that *we* might inflict upon *each other*.

What might it *sound like* to hate another member of the church?

Gossip, complaining about insignificant deficiencies in someone’s character,
“I can’t stand the way he doesn’t stop talking.”
So what! At he thinks you’re worth talking too!
Assuming the worst about someone’s intentions,
“They’re just doing this because they’re trying to sabotage me”
Name-calling,
if not to their face then perhaps behind their back or under your breath.

And what are you doing when you speak in this way about others?

You’re killing their reputation, aren’t you?
Perhaps that’s another way that hate is linked to murder;
You may fall short of taking a life but you can easily take a reputation.

And what might it *look like* to hate someone?

Sometime it's found in the most subtle of actions;
Or, in what you fail to do rather than in what you obviously do
Cold-shouldering, ignoring, overlooking.
A failure to acknowledge or thank someone.
Yesterday at our Men's breakfast Matthew Bond from Anglicare
spoke about toxic bosses, and one sign of a toxic boss
is that they take all the credit while delegating all the blame!
And I don't think it's too far fetched to label this a type of hatred,
a type of hatred where you murder someone else's opportunities.

What might it *feel like* to hate someone?

Well, have you ever had that moment
when you feel glad that someone else has failed?
The Germans have a word for this: Schadenfreude,
which literally means "damage-joy".
We all know the feeling, when someone you dislike has a setback
and you think to yourself "Good. I'm glad that's happened. Good".
And we try to justify this feeling by telling ourselves that the person
deserved this set back or had to be taught a lesson, and maybe they did,
but what are we really rejoicing over?
the opportunity for someone to improve or the fact that they're suffering?

Friends there maybe some necessity for us to repent of this sin of hatred.

Maybe because of how we think of people here at this church,
or maybe because of how we think of people at a previous congregation.

And if we have identified this darkness within our own heart,

then we must remember what else we've heard John say in his letter:
If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.
That if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous
One, who is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.
That Jesus appeared so that he might take away our sins.

Yes it's painful to identify this darkness within us,

but its also wonderful to know that Jesus takes the darkness away.
I recently heard a story told by another preacher
of a Chinese man who had come to know Christ.
And the preacher asked the man
"What has changed now that you're a Christian?" and the man said
"I used to hate Japanese people". Now why would he say that?
Because there's a whole history of war between these two cultures.
10-25 million Chinese died during the Japanese invasion of WWII.
And so he would have grown up hearing terrible stories.
"I used to hate Japanese people, *but now I love them*. Now I love them"

Jesus purifies us from all sin.

And so what does it look like to be purified of hate? What does it look like to love?

John has a second case study for us in v16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

If hatred is the act of taking life away from others,
either their literal life in the form of murder
or their dignity and quality of life by other means.

Then love is the act of forgoing your own life to *bring* life to others.

And this is exactly what Jesus did on the cross.

His death was a willing sacrifice, something he agreed to do,
which brought us eternal life by allowing for the forgiveness of our sin.

John calls this act of Jesus an act of love, and in v16
he sets it before us as an example to imitate:

And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters, is what he writes.

Now, there may be times when, like Jesus,

a literal life is laid down to bring life to someone else.

But John has in mind more everyday examples:

Verse 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

Sacrificial love has its ultimate expression in the giving of one life for another,
but the principle filters down into much smaller decisions,
in particular the free giving up of some of our material possessions
to help meet the needs of those among us who are worse off.

And it pleases me to say that I see this being carried out often:

meal rosters for the sick,
transport for the immobile,
funds raised to support men and women
who have given up their careers to work in ministry full time
funds raised to build a school in Malawi.
Funds raised to support refugee families who've escaped from Syria

And, as a matter of fact,

the staff are meeting with our local Anglicare church liason person this week
to see what else we might be able to do.

But be warned, whatever we end up doing,
it will require a willingness to share from what we ourselves have received.

We'll probably need people to help with organizational skills too!

But we'll let you know the outcome of the meeting and how you can help,
how you can love not with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

So we've heard from John about what love actually looks like,

but not everyone knows what to look for.

There was a very awkward moment in a TV interview in the early 80s when Prince Charles and Dianna Spencer were being interviewed after their engagement.

The interviewer asks "what word would you use to describe how you feel?"

Charles says "delighted and happy"

The interviewer suggests "and I suppose in love!"

Diana, blushes and responds "of course"

Charles responds "whatever 'in love' means"!

What?!! "Whatever 'in love' means"?!!

The Prince of Wales obviously had trouble defining this very important concept!

The Apostle John would say "Charles, you can be more definite!"

Love means imitating Christ's cross!

It means saying no to yourself to give life to others!

And as John has said elsewhere,

in imitating Jesus people will know that we are Christ's disciples,
it will be the mark that demonstrates we are gospel-believing people.
So don't be a fake! Let people know they've got the real deal!