

## 1 John 3

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us...”

So apparently there are different types of love, if God can give us a particular kind of it. In English we only have that one word: love. But I think we all know there are different kinds of it. We love pizza, we love our spouses. Are those a different kind of love? I suppose they better be! Though Pizza doesn't ever nag me...

We love our spouses and we love our children. Which do you love more!? That's a dumb question, hopefully. But do you love them or express that love for them the same? Certainly not.

And so now we begin to make distinctions in love.

And Greek helps us here as many of you know: Phile is brotherly affectionate love, Eros is physical love, agape and storge are deeper, more sacrificial, promise based love. And I would note that in our reading today, it is “See what kind of agape the Father has given to us that we should be called his children.”

And yet we live in the age of “love is love,” which is a nefarious move to make you think that all physical love is good love, don't fall for that lie. Not all love is the same and not all physical “love” is good and we know it. Eros causes more pain than any other kind of love, physically, emotionally, relationally and is to be treated with great care. And we all know it, hence the many laws surrounding

physical love which are both wise, and prudent to protect this volatile gift, a gift yes, but a volatile one. But don't you see "love is love?" no, there are different kinds.

So, with that warning aside, I hope as we begin to see this truth, it may cause us to reflect on our love for others, and how that is expressed, and how God loves us.

And while, as I mentioned, Greek helps us, these words still fail to fully define the love in our relationships. For example, the spouses once more, yes, the spouses are equipped to safely express eros, physical love, but that is not the fullness of the relationship. Should there not also be Phile, "brotherly" love, of shared interest and mutual laughter now and again? Should there not also be "Agape" love based on a promise, for when times get tough?

And so our relationships express different combinations of love, resulting in unique, deep relationships. Relationships that are complex, more than skin deep.

And this is who we are, this is how we interact, and it is a good thing. And it is how God loves us. We think our relationship with him is solely based on our behavior! "I sinned, God doesn't like me anymore." Is he that fickle and skin deep? No, there is depth here, that we can rejoice in.

And, I suppose it should be mentioned, that if there is love there is the potential for great pain. And in a way that must be so. To love something or someone is to risk it hurting you.

And so we invest in these relationships, we make these promises, and then someone gives more attention somewhere else, and you feel second rate. Or you sacrifice for them, and they don't reciprocate or notice, and now you feel taken advantage of or underappreciated. And then that person is hurt because you didn't meet an expectation but you never thought or expected the bar to be set there – and so many other families or husbands or wives don't have it set there, why should you get in trouble for it? And then the friend moves away. And then the parent dies. And then the child rebels in high school and college. And it hurts.

And these hurts hurt because we love. And if they are not healed by the kind of love that is forgiveness, or reunion, then we will, eventually be forced to try and guard ourselves – by loving less. Because the less you love, the less likely you are to be hurt. So you start thinking harsh thoughts about that person and hoping they will fail, maybe you even sabotage them yourself, because then you can celebrate that failure as expected. And we withdraw. Because it doesn't hurt so much if you don't think about them as much, but, of course, the side effect, or main effect, is that love goes by the wayside. And the relationship is poisoned or abandoned, and there is no laughter, no affection, no mutual care or concern, and it just... withers

away to loneliness that we think we like better than the hurts of love – but I’m not so sure they are better at all...

And so God makes us. And makes promises to us and sets us up as stewards of his creation. And we decide we don’t need or want him, we self sabotage, we push him away and hide in the bushes with our sin. And yet, God still looks for us, he loves us with that kind of love. He calls out to Adam in the garden.

And then, as we, now, who know our brokenness, still continue in it. We offer him more and more reason to break off the relationship, to save himself the heartache of watching his beloved creations rebel against what he calls good and each other. “Surely, any day now, he will be done, he will be out.” Not as if we could hurt him, but at least to be “out” on us and our hurting of each other and spurning of his good ways for evil. “Surely, he will treat us like we treat each other.” We say: “Cut them out of my life.” “That person doesn’t deserve my love.” “IF you knew what they really thought you would ghost them too!”

Yet he does the opposite. He comes closer. He takes on flesh. Yes his kind of love is more than skin deep. He doesn’t distance himself to love less and “hurt” less, he comes closer to love more, and to actually hurt – to actually feel pain. He does that precisely because his love is so great. If he did not love, he would not hurt.

He comes to dirt roads and tired feet, for years. He comes with a staff – teaching, laughing with his disciples. But then his path leads up to a hill with a cross on it. Back bloody, insults, spit, nails and death. What kind of love is this? Agape. It is sacrificial to be sure. But so strong, so great so as to withstand great pain. He could deflect, he could withdraw, he could justify himself (we can't) he could avoid the pain of loving people like us. But he chooses to nevertheless because of his promise. A promised love. A sacrificial love. Love that longs for the other, for you, to be clean and pure and saved even if it means pain for him. A love that longs to be with you. Closer still! Agape.

I suppose I can get back to the text now: God loves you with this kind of love, to make you his child. Will he kick you out of the family each time you sin? We don't do that to our children, do we? Is his interest in you simply a passing tacit interest, skin deep? Are you his children? Is his inheritance for someone else? Do you have to perform to a certain standard or lose your status as his child?

These are ridiculous questions when you give them even a passing thought. And yet we live in fear that God will smite us down at any given moment! Christian, look to the Cross and see great pain, but don't miss the connection that it therefore requires great love. See someone who is invested in you, invested their everything in you, just as he said he would by his promise! Why would He abandon you now?

Look to the cross and see someone who loves you unto death, look to the empty tomb and see someone who loves you into eternity.

And so we love because he first loved us. And we are free to share and rejoice and receive love. Which, please don't get this twisted is not to say our love of each other is a prerequisite for his love for us. No, no, and no. He loves first. And that is a relief, because I think, if we are honest, in our hearts there may not be a ton of love all the time. Maybe there is a lot of bitterness, hate, fear, doubt, and selfishness. But God knows it's there in your heart and still, still, said, "I will make them my child!" That's right, he had a choice to claim you as his own. He didn't have to. Yet this is the kind of love he has. It is a love expressed in an active choice, calling you and putting his name on you in baptism, it is an active choice to come and die for you. And he is not stupid with his choices.

And so if you find yourself struggling to love – go back to his love. The greatest love. Sit at your Father's feet a while, hear his word. What might you learn from his love? I suspect you will learn of a love, that, let's be honest, we can never attain to, especially here, but a love that is yours nevertheless. Because it is a love that is willing to be hurt. A love based on choice, promise, action, sacrifice, inheritance, and resurrection reunion.

Yes this is all saints day, observed, we are saints and sinners, those who have died in the faith are just saints, and that's a good thing. We will be like them someday, or should I say as our verse today does: we will be like him! And our pains and hurts from love lost, or love taken, will be healed and whole and the mourners, oh how they will be comforted when they hug that loved one again in the resurrection and, I don't care what their last fight was about, because it will all be forgiven! God be praised! Oh, but, speaking of Him, we will hug our loved ones yes, but I have a hunch it will be hard to take your eyes off the King who won that reunion for us, by his sacrificial and steadfast love. In His name. Amen.