

Hillside Free Methodist Church
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Trinity 1: God is Love. 1 John 4:11-16

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. 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.

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. (1 John 4:16)

God is love.

That is what the Bible says. God is love. But what does that mean?

Jesus tells us that the single most critical distinctive in a Christian's life is love. It's not knowledge or intellect, it's not power or strength, it's not beauty or charm, it's not money or poverty but love by which all people will know you are a follower of Jesus Christ. God is love. God is powerful, everywhere always at all times and knows everything and can do anything. That is an amazing thought. It's a very good thing that a being who is all knowing, all powerful, all present is also love.

God is love. God made the world. I don't think it's going too far then say that truly it is love that makes the world go round.

God is love. But what does that mean?

God has warm positive regard for you? Maybe, the Bible does say you are apple of God's eye (Zechariah 2:8). Does it mean that God is self-sacrificial on behalf of others? That is certainly true – Jesus on the cross makes this abundantly clear. Does it mean that God will bring you flowers? Just look at the lilies of the field, and you know that's true - in fact God brings us butterflies, mountains, the ocean, sunny skies and romantic stars at night – all from God who loves us. Does it mean that he cares for the people and creatures on earth? Possibly, Psalm 104 tells us that God is actively caring for the needs of every living creature - from the birds in the trees, to leviathan in the oceans, to you and I - human beings. From the very air we breath and existence itself to the eternal salvation we have in Jesus Christ the Son of God through the Holy Spirit we can say undoubtedly - God loves us. We can tell by all that he has done.

Yet I think the statement that God is love is rooted even deeper in who God is rather than what God does. God does loving things, has provided lovingly for his creation. But that is different from saying that God is love. One could say that I am loving person – or perhaps that I am a spiteful person. It would not be appropriate to say that I am love, or that I am spite. That's pretty bold. That kind of terminology speaks to something deeper than what a person does to very root of that person's being.

The very root of the being we call God is love.

Now, I find this to be a very interesting statement. It is profound in what it implies about God. I can be holy, and be alone. In fact, being alone might help me to be holy - to be set apart from sin. I can be intellectual and be alone. In fact, the solitude of a desert island might well grant me the opportunity to have a clarity of mind and focus of thought that would be missing if I were distracted by other people. I can be all powerful, and be alone - having created an entire cosmos as my plaything and play billiards with the sun, moon and stars but I don't need to share the space with anyone else.

However, I can not love alone.

Love requires relationship. The very thought of love in any of its forms – romantic love, platonic love, the love of friends, love of family, love of country – demonstrates that love requires relationship. Well, that is true for me. I can not be solitary and claim to love.

But what about God?

That God is love is a profound statement about the nature of God. This nature of God is something Christians have given a word to - we call this "the Trinity." In fact, the very simple term "god" can be used to describe all sorts of deities. We can use the term god to describe Allah, Zeus, Hailie Salessie (if you're a Rasta Man) or the Sioux Great Spirit.

When Christians talk about God, they are talking about the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Three in one.

God has existed as three-in-one from the beginning. There was never a time when God was not Father, Son and Spirit. The very nature of God is one of relationship. In your bulletin I share the Greek word that ancient theologians used to describe this divine being – *perichoresis*. This literally means mutual interpenetration - a relational interconnectedness. Another translation would be to mutually permeate. The word is rooted in *perichoreuo* which means "dance around." The concept of God's Trinitarian nature, while very much a mystery, can be seen as at its core a relationship. Hence, the deep meaning behind the Biblical statement – "God is Love" relates to the very fact of God existing as a loving relationship: Father, Son, Spirit. God calls us into relationship with Father, Son and Spirit - God calls us to join the dance.

The Scripture says that we love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). Indeed, that is not merely a statement relating to the Christian idea of love, which is *agape* love - a self-sacrificial commitment to another. Every concept of love for every being that ever graced this planet has flowed in one fashion or another from the very being of God. The very fabric of the universe, wrapped together in relationship, is a fabric of love.

God exists in a divine relationship, and from this flows a creation which is established in love and working toward the goal of love. Friends, love makes the world go round, because God is fundamentally, at core, revealed to us as love.

God the Father loves you. (1 John 4:11, 14, 16)

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. . . And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. . . 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.

The good news is that the loving relationship of God extends to you. God the Father loves you! Just looking at our text today we see that God loved us! We can rely on the love God has for us. The love God has for us is seen most clearly in his willingness to send Jesus Christ to earth to live and die and rise again for your salvation.

Sometimes we doubt the love of God for us.

The car breaks down - Why me God? The body begins to wear out - Why me God? The mind starts to fail - Why me God?

I wonder if our children ever doubt our love for them? When they fall down and scrape their knee and we decide to let them bandage their own wound. When we decide to teach them to earn money before getting the toy they long for, do they doubt our love for them? When we place a limit on how long they can stay out at night, or make them study when they'd rather watch television? Even if our children cannot view these necessary parental acts as love, perhaps they will view our overall care for them in this way. I think at least some modest proof of love is that parents give up the pursuit of our own dreams, and go to work every day to bring home sustenance and keep a roof over their head. There's a lot more to love than that, but that's something tangible.

There's a lot to the love of God. But even on those days when God chastens us, or allows us to suffer and grow through it, or experience a loss that is likely to draw us closer to him if we would let it – even on those days when the love God is less visible there is a clear and tangible proof of his love. Breathe the air God made. Touch the person next to you, that's a gift from God. Look at the colors of the light streaming through the window. That's God again. Wait a minute, you exist at all – a figment of God's imagination – his dream, and according to Scripture, even his heart's desire. That's love. Every day - whether it is easy or difficult - is a day full of evidence of God's love.

Yet there is even more evidence of God's love for you.

God the Son loves you. (1 John 4:14, 15)

I've often heard it put this way. How much does God love me? This much (cross-wide arms). "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world." There really is no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend, and God in Christ has done exactly this.

If the sun never did shine again, if birds ceased to chirp, if a nuclear winter wiped out all that we knew, if arthritis grips my hands and fingers and a coronary grips my heart, if I lost my job to the boss's nephew we can still know that God loves us because of Jesus Christ. God the Son, Jesus the Son of God, loved us this much.

Just as God the Father and God the Son have been dancing together forever, so God sent Jesus to dance with us, to invite us into the dance. From the beginning the dance has been part of God's plan, but we've too often refused to dance. We refuse to let the joy of Christ be part of our life - for so many reasons! We refuse to dance with God.

Yet, God refuses to let us be wallflowers. In Christ, God who has not been seen, God who is spirit, God who is the creator, enters the dance floor of our lives. He approaches us, and gives us a living example of what the dance looks like, of what the

nature of God looks like.

It looks like Jesus Christ. It looks like someone who forgives an adulteress while telling her to sin no more. It looks like someone who forgives a thief and in so doing leads the thief to give back all that had been stolen. It looks like someone who sees hungry people and feeds them. It looks like someone who has learned not waste time today over worry about tomorrow, but rather trusting in God to care the needs of each day. It looks like someone who says, "forgive them" even as he is nailed to a cross. The dance looks like someone who loves us 'this much.'

John writes, (15) "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God."

Listen to that. When we acknowledge, or profess, or agree with God that the identity of Jesus is not merely a Palestinian Jew with good teaching and a few tricks up his sleeve, but the Son of God then God lives in us.

What?

Doesn't that take you aback? God lives in us when we confess or profess or come to realize the truth about Jesus. God the creator lives in you. God the all powerful, all knowing, all present, all holy, all loving God lives in you when you believe that his son is Jesus Christ. Because if you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, then you must believe he means what he says he means. That the core identifier of a true believer is to be like Jesus, to be like God the Father - that is - love.

When you place your faith in Christ, you place your faith in God, you join God's wonderful dance. When people dance, they become like one. They are two, but they move together, they flow together, they begin to anticipate each other, to form a motion that shows strength and grace, coordination and power. It's actually fun. And when we say yes to Jesus, we enter a new dance floor of grace and love. God lives in us and in some marvelous, mystical way we become part of that *perichoresis* of God, that mutual inter-penetration.

Do not misunderstand me, we do not become God, nor is God diminished to become us. I am stunned by the way Peter describes this though, through faith in Christ we become "partakers of the divine nature". You see, not only does God begin to dwell within our hearts, but we dwell in God. "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him *and he in God.*"

In Christ, God enters your life, and you enter in a new way into God's life. When you receive God the Son, not only does your heart open to God, but God's heart opens to you in a new way.

I don't know how all this works, but I do know the presence of God which makes it work is the Holy Spirit.

God the Spirit loves you. (1 John 4:13, 15, 16)

"We know we live in him - and he in us because he has given us of his spirit." It is the Spirit which makes us aware of the presence of God, it is through the Spirit that God extends his hand to us, bidding us to join him in the dance.

Now, the power that formed the suns and planets enters into our lives through the Spirit. Jesus in the flesh does not find some odd way to peel away our own and enter in us like some strange alien movie. It is the Spirit which indwells us. The spirit is

odorless, and invisible, and it adds no extra bulk to your package, but the Spirit of God is powerful. It is the very power of love itself. The very power of God.

When the Spirit is in your life, according to the Scripture - you know God lives in you. You just know. And part of how you know is that through the Spirit you see that Jesus is the Son of God, and has entered into your life, and you realize how much God the Father loves you. So now, you are both in God and have God in you.

Wow.

Who do you love? (1 John 4:11, 16)

God the Father, Son and Spirit exist in relationship as the ultimate being of love. God made human beings - as we shall next week - specifically to be incomplete outside of relationship. So then, the great evidence of the presence of God the Father, Son and Spirit in our lives is this: "If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

We were made to be like our creator - made in the image of God.

We were designed, custom built, to love. When we hate, envy, hurt, spew anger, kill, maim, steal from, injure or betray anyone – we are living outside of the nature and character of God. The Father created the world in such a way as it might sustain your life, proof of love. Beyond that, God comes to us in Jesus that we might join in the cosmic dance of love. We need Christ to enter into a life of love. He showed us how to dance. And the Spirit energizes and empowers us to join in that dance.

God did this so we might learn to love not only God but each other. In fact, we cannot claim to know God, who is love, if are unable to learn to love one another. When we have received the gift of God's love, we must not keep it to ourselves. Love is not a solitary activity. It is when we love one another that we experience that completeness of the Trinitarian God in our lives.

With whom are you dancing the dance of love?

Maybe you're a bit clumsy, and have stepped on your partners feet a time or two. Grow and learn to love more, to be less hurtful. Learn to let the Spirit lead, and more gracefulness will come with time and practice. We are all a work in progress. When your partner steps on your toes, let the forgiveness of Christ be your guide and continue the dance.

Let's learn to live out the amazing reality of the great Biblical promise.

"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him."