

Hello everyone! And welcome to our Wednesday Word devotion for today, July 8, 2020! Thank you so much for tuning in and taking this time out of your day to focus on God and your faith.

So last week we talked about one of our most foundational aspects of faith, and one of my personal favorite topics - God is love. We read 1 John 4 and took time to breathe through the life-giving joy that is God's perfect love, which casts out fear. And because this is such a foundational topic, and a reminder that is so needed these days, today's devotion is what I'm going to call "God is love, part 2". I can't wait to dive into this beautiful topic even more with you today.

So as we begin our additional time dwelling on God's perfect love, please join me in a word of prayer:

God our creator, sustainer, and savior, we come to you today with hope, rooted in your love for us and in our hopes for our world. God we know that through you and with you all things are possible, and for that assured knowledge, we give you thanks. Lord as we encounter moments of fear, as we wrestle with the challenges of the world around us, help us to root all that we do in love. For you first loved us, and you teach us how to love. Help us and teach us now, that your life-saving and healing love may shine forth in all we do, and for all people. In your beloved Son Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

So as I mentioned before, thinking about God is love is a big topic and I want to continue to look at a few more facets of how this works and what it means for us as faithful people today. We only scratched the surface with our devotion last week! So to begin for today, I'm going to read from 1 John 4 to remind us of this powerful, perfect love - this is verses 7-21:

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or

sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

The Word of the Lord.

Last week we talked about what God as love means for us personally, and laid some foundations for how we know this love is real. Most tangibly, it is real through Christ Jesus, his sacrifice for us. And while there is comfort and joy to be found in simply being reminded of our innate belovedness, there then also comes the point of what it means for how we live our lives, what we are created to do, rather than simply be.

The verses that are particularly sticking with me this week are these: Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another...if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

We are able to love because of God's first love for us. Our love is powerful and it will change the world for the sake of bringing God's reign of perfect love even closer to us, for our own selves and the people around us. But our love is not perfect. We are human and we are fallible. There is nothing wrong with this - it's just the reality - we are human, we are loved, and we are not perfect. Sometimes we fail to listen to the spirit of God, the spirit of love. Sometimes we get so focused on our own stuff, our own fears or anxieties or discomforts, the spirits that distract from God that it's hard to determine what to do. And it's good to be gracious and kind towards ourselves. But we cannot let our imperfection stop us from loving one another.

God's love is perfected in us. This is what it means to be the body of Christ in the world - that we have the love of God woven into us, into our bodies, our inmost beings from the time we were born. But that love does not just lay stagnant and unaccessed in us. That love is meant to be shone forth. That love is meant to be the change we wish to see in the world. That love is what brings God's reign closer.

So while we all house the love of God within us, it cannot and is not meant to be stopped within us. We can't just soak up all that God-love for our own sakes to make us only feel better about ourselves. But we have to live into that God-love for the sake of our brothers and sisters and siblings in Christ. We cannot get arrogant or self-centered. Because God loves us so much, we must love one another. This living into and out of love is what makes us followers of Jesus Christ - that we act upon these commandments of love, and receive love in return.

I'm reminded now of a sermon that was preached by one of our very talented young folks in our Mt. Zion church family earlier this year, Ellie. One of the very wise and true claims she made in her sermon was that we see God in other people. She saw God in her friends that supported her through a tough time, and I'm sure many of us have experienced as well. We see God in our loved ones, in our child's faces when we cheer them up, when we see the gift of love made real

in the promises of marriage and deep friendship, when we receive an unexpected gift or surprise, when we hear the voice of a dear friend who knows us so well. We are truly beholden to one another and cannot emotionally or spiritually isolate ourselves from those around us. God's love is too big, too perfect and too great for us to house it all for our own purposes. God's love is meant to be shown towards one another.

And true, we are not always perfect in loving one another. Sometimes we intentionally or unintentionally hurt or show hatred towards one another. Sometimes we act out from a place of pain that then in turn hurts the people around us. And sometimes we make decisions that benefit only ourselves or our own comfort, and don't take others into account. But it is about our intention, action, and patterns of behavior that matters. When we keep love of neighbors as our main intent, we do our best. When we keep ourselves open to growing and learning and doing what we can to make our world even better than we found it, we are doing the work of bringing God's reign even closer to this beautiful and broken world. When we put being in relationship with each other as our best priority, not giving up on one another, that is when we show the love of God to our sisters, brothers, and siblings.

We are empowered to do this loving by God's love within us, indeed God is love, and we must express it with and for the people around us. God is the love we have for one another and our love of God goes absolutely hand in hand with the love we show one another. It is a gift to be in loving relationships, where we experience love from others, that is how we can so reliably see the love of God, and then we must shine forth that love too, to be that light and life and love for others that we have also first received.

After all, shining forth God's love into the world is how God's love is perfected, and that perfect love not only casts out fear, but also has the power to heal so much in this beautiful, broken world.

So, dear friends, for our spiritual practice this week, I invite you to be the love of God in the world, shine forth the love that saves and empowers us all. Let's do some tangible things to share the perfect love of God in our world. Let's reach out to one another, make some friendly phone calls, send cards, even go on distanced walks as you are able! On a bigger level, maybe make a donation as you are able to organizations that are working to bring the love of God and love for our neighbors even closer. Do whatever you feel called to, in your heart and in your spirit, to share the love of God in the world, and allow this perfect love to cast out fear for the whole body of Christ.

And please, dear friends, if you have any chapters or verses in scripture that have a deep meaning for you, that have guided you in challenging times or served as a foundation for you, as you feel called, please write what those verses are in the comments on today's video, or you can email them to me at pastor@mtzionhudson.com if you'd like that to be more private. You may just hear a devotion or two inspired by these favorite and foundational verses in upcoming weeks.

So now as we close our time together, please join me in the words our Lord Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen.

Thank you so much again for tuning in today! Have a beautiful rest of your day. Go in peace dear friends, Amen.