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Welcome to the New Life Podcast, a ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, [www.newlifethica.org](http://www.newlifethica.org). Now here's this week's sermon. This week's sermon is preached by Pastor Emeritus Steve Froelich.

00:44

A reading from the first epistle of the apostle John, chapter 4, verses 7 through 17.

00:52

Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love.

01:18

Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this, we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit.

01:45

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love. And whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in him.

02:12

By this is love perfected with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

02:29

There's one question that I could ask you that would reveal the answer to which that would reveal the true you. That would reveal who you really are. One question more than any other that would explain who you are. One question that will make sense of why you have the friends that you have. Why you dress the way that you do. Why you spend as many hours as you do in the lab or in the garden or...

02:58

anywhere else in your life? How many hours you pursue the career that you choose? One question more than the other that will pull together all the many threads of your life to make sense of you. And that question is, what do you love? Whom do you love?

03:21

It's not what makes your heart go a pitter patter, what makes you go weak in the knees, what takes your breath away, what exhilarates you sexually. It's not what sweeps you off your feet and would make even Roy Kent want to sing and dance. Although those reactions may accompany love. They are not love or the proof of love.

03:44

Love is not the pleasure of being the object of another person's attention, as amazing as it is to experience that. Love is not the security of being cared for as much as we long for that belonging.

04:00

Love is not the knowledge that you are someone's best friend forever, as much as we are made for relationship.

04:10

Some of you know love by its absence. The sometimes crushing, disappointing sorrow, anger, the feeling or the reality that you are not loved.

04:26

But love is why we are here. It is our calling. As we've heard read already, dear friends, we are to love. Let us, it is an invitation, a command, let us love one another. And if we better understand what love is, I believe we will better understand how we can love one another. Back in February,

04:56

Cheryl marked the 48th anniversary of our first date in 1977. So in thinking about this near half century of love, I've personalized what Anglican priest Tish Harrison Warren wrote in her New York Times op-ed, *Some Reflections on Love in the Context of Marriage*.

05:25

I don't know if I truly loved Cheryl when we got married, or if I even knew what love was, but I know that we are learning to love each other with each passing day, and there is a profound joy in that messy process. I'm overwhelmed with gratitude that she has stuck with me, that we get to live this life together with all the sorrow, betrayal, glory, loveliness, surprise, and mystery that entails.

05:55

So much beauty has grown from what at times seemed like impossibly stony ground.

06:02

I don't feel about Cheryl how I did when we got married. We are both so much more aware of the obnoxious imperfections and real pathologies each of us brings to the table. But I

also feel far more loyalty, respect, love, delight, and care for her than I was capable of back then. I have discovered how difficult I am to live with and how difficult she is to live with.

06:32

but we've also learned the tragic, comedic, stumbling, and deeply joyful dance of living together anyway.

06:43

Love is at the center of what it means to be human. It's not about being single or married. Love is at the core of Christian theology and the Christian way of life. Love itself is a trinity. There is the lover, there is the one loved, and there is the choice to love what we love. Love is what binds our heart to what we love.

07:10

We are loyal to what we love. We give our allegiance to what we love. And it's what unites the whole person, our mind, our will, and our affections. And so it is the object of our love that defines our love. It's who or what we love that defines us. In other words, love, it's not about me.

07:35

So if you want to know who you are, answer the question, what do you love? Love not only defines who we are, but love is at the core of what makes God God. Well, why is that? Well, as we've read already, God tells us in his word that he is love. In fact, so important John repeats it. He is the thing itself. But.

08:02

This is where grammar fails us. say God is love, so therefore those two are equivalent. No. God is love, but love is not God.

08:14

We do not worship love. Well, no, yes we do. And that's a sin and it's idolatry that will destroy us like every other false God. But God has made us in his image. It is his nature to love, so therefore we love. And love can exist only in relationship and we have been made for the community produced by love. Again, all this comes from our triune God and his creating us in his image. And so the sum,

08:44

of all that God asks us to be in our life together in this world is summed up in Jesus quoting the words of Moses, love. Love the Lord your God with your whole being, with your passion, your intellect, as Eugene Peterson translates it, and love your neighbor as yourself. That is, the same self-protective, covetous love I crave for myself.

09:11

God is love. And if he's the definition of love, then for God, love does not fill a need in his being. In the community of the Trinity, he is eternally full of love. His love is an eternal outflowing and overflowing among the community of the Trinity, each member seeking the other's glory. And so by definition, love is not about my feeling or my fulfillment.

09:39

contentment, pleasure, or satisfaction, although those feelings are proper and may accompany love. Love is about the person being loved. The movement toward another person that, to use David Brooks' term, illuminates them, or to use Paul's language in Ephesians 5, makes the person we love glorious.

10:05

To that end, as Paul writes in that famous passage in 1 Corinthians 13, love suffers long. Love is patient, kind, sacrificial, humble.

10:21

You and I live in a world, even though fallen, in which love is possible. All humans share a longing for it. Our minds stretch to wrap around it. Our arms reach to unfold it. I mean, how

many poems have there been written about it? And still, we can't quite get there. We beg for it to hold us, or we curl up in dark isolation or in self-protective anger when it is absent.

10:52

We know intuitively that there is a transcendent immensity to love.

11:01

I think his own Carl Sagan once said, for small creatures such as we, the vastness is unbearable except for love.

11:13

On this point, now, don't rush me with your knives out when I say this, but I think C.S. Lewis is wrong. That's right, he would do, he would indeed. When he writes about eros as a misfocused distortion of love, no, eros is a creational good that is often too easily satisfied.

11:43

It is a love for things, for things of this world, and it is very good when it points us to the love beyond. This love here in this life is real and good, but it will never be enough until we are in the presence of what it anticipates. I love the description in Isaiah about the world made new, the wine, the music, the food, the beauty is good here.

12:13

but it will not be complete until we stand in the new creation.

12:20

This book, from which we read every day, this book is the greatest love story ever written. God, the mighty creator of the universe, setting his eternal love upon human beings, his children who love him in return, a bride being prepared to wed the bridegroom, Jesus

Christ. All of history is moving toward the consummation of the ages, the great wedding feast spread out in the glorious presence of God the Father.

12:47

bride and groom united face to face, unashamed forever, and by the spirit enveloped in the rapture of love of which all earthly loves are but an anticipation.

13:00

At the heart of community, the animating center of this life together, as Bonhoeffer called it, is love, this central defining driving force that binds us together and makes us God's people in this place. Now, if God is who he says he is, then we will demonstrate that character and make it tangible and visible in our lives together.

13:28

And this is what Jesus says in John 13, this is how everyone will know that you are my disciples when you love each other.

13:40

Now.

13:42

Why are we people drawn into this fellowship?

13:53

I would suggest sometimes we are drawn out of brokenness and sadness and loneliness and injustice and we have come here to find love. To be loved. To learn how to love.

14:12

And that really is what brings me to our text this morning, the focus of our text this morning.

14:22

a few verses pulled out of the first two epistles of John. But three times when John writes, is love. This is love from John 4:10. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sin. 1 John 4:17, this is love completed among us.

14:48

so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is so are we in this world. And then from second John six this is love that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning his command is that you walk in love. So let's look briefly at each of those three statements. The first is love received.

15:16

This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. As John will write in just a few verses later, we love because he first loved us. Love begins with God, because God is love. Life begins with God. Existence begins with God. Consider the creation. It did not create itself.

15:46

It is not eternal. It exists by the will of the one greater than creation, by one outside of creation.

15:54

You and I do not have to exist, but we do. And our very breath is the first evidence of God's love. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have set in place, what are mere mortals that you are mindful of them? Human beings that you care for them. You have made them a little lower than yourself and you've crowned them with glory and honor. The psalmist writes in Psalm 8.



16:24

So why does the world exist? Why do we exist? God has no need. He has never lacked anything. And there's only one satisfactory answer to explain our existence. Love. God made the world and he made humans to bear his image that he might love us.

16:45

And as our text tells us in divine love, God always makes the first move. There is never a because in God's love. He loves freely out of the overflow of his goodness and joy and wisdom. God loves the world so much that he gives himself to a world that did not invite him, people who do not want him.

17:13

and to people who believe that he is their enemy.

17:18

He freely offered his one and only son, who freely offered himself as the love of God to the world so that we might not die but live forever in his love. And so we love because he has loved us and made us in his image and therefore we as humans have the capacity to love.

17:36

And while people who do not know God really and truly love, they will not understand the purpose of love or the goal of love or the character of love unless they know God is the source of love.

17:51

And love apart from knowing and worshipping God can be real.

17:57

but it will be inadequate because it does not understand or trust the purpose for which we were created to love.

18:06

We have been created to love our God, Father, Son, and Spirit, the one which is the one love to rule them all, all other loves. Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 4, what do you have that you did not receive? What do you have that was not given to you? The answer is nothing.

18:34

And so to love as God loves us means that the first movement of love in our lives is to receive love without having to earn it or prove our worthiness or to give love freely without any expectation of what will be returned.

18:55

And so to love well we must drink often from the well of grace. Secondly, this is love, love completed. John 4 17, this is love completed among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is so are we to be in this world. There are two great acts of love in history, acts of God in human history.

19:25

He has shown us his love in creation and he has shown us his love in redemption. Now, we live now with the certainty that both of his loving actions will be completed. In fact, the certainty that he will complete what he has started is so great that the Bible speaks about in the present tense.

19:52

You are glorified today, Paul writes in Romans 8, which is the last stage of God's series of redemptive acts. But present tense is if it's a reality today, it is a completed certainty. But nowhere is that more clearly revealed to us than in Jesus' words from the cross that we will hear repeated again in just a couple of weeks. It is.

20:21

Finished.

20:25

It is completed.

20:28

What?

20:32

our redemption. He has fulfilled the covenant so that we might be declared righteous and might be embraced as the children of God. And there is nothing to add to what he has accomplished. He has lived the life that we can never live and by grace through faith he has given his own righteousness to us. What great love is this? And he has loved the Father completely with his whole being so much so that in going to the cross he prayed with great anguish yet love. Nevertheless, not my will but may what

21:02

May your will be done. What great love is this? And the certainty that creation will be brought to completion rests entirely upon his resurrection. Christ is risen. Jesus, I'm sorry I don't want to seal any thunder for a couple of weeks. Christ is risen. Jesus is the first fruits of the world made new. The resurrected Jesus is the down payment of the promise that he will bring creation to completion.

21:31

He is resurrected as all who are in him will be resurrected. Where he goes, we will go.

21:41

We were created to love him as our greatest good. Augustine writes truly here, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until we find our rest in you. But we are not born believing that. We are all convinced to our bones that self-love is the greatest good, that love, that self-love that fulfills and completes us, we think.

22:09

But self-love, as powerful as it is, only stirs the restlessness of our hearts and digs the hole even deeper for us.

22:19

There is an incompleteness to human love as we know it and experience it. And in fact, the very presence of love and desire in our human experience in the world as it is, is a reminder of that incompleteness. Our love is driven by a longing for something more. And so Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century preached the fact that we desire at all, the fact that we possess desire means that we are essentially incomplete beings.

22:48

unfinished. If we were self-sufficient, if we were our own good, if we were already finished, we would not have any desire. The reason for this is that desire is nothing less than a yearning for a good which we do not yet possess.

23:08

Or as C.S. Lewis put it, if we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world, the world made new, the new creation.

23:27

But the good for which we long is ultimately the belonging and the righteousness that are found in being reconciled to God. Because of sin and our rebellion, we do not have the capacity to love God or one another as we were created to love. And so the loving

intervention of God in Christ by the power of his Spirit is necessary. And God acts. Christ comes to us willingly, standing in our place.

23:55

God comes to us as he did at the beginning. Adam, Eve, where are you?

24:03

and God acts. This is no divine fratricide as some accuse us of believing. This is the love of one laying his life down for us to fulfill his own covenantal demands of justice and righteousness. It is a love completed. It is a love accomplished. It is a gift given not because we believe, but when we

24:26

And when we know this completed atoning love of God in Christ, it makes all the difference in the world as we put our feet on the floor every day to put your head on the pillow tonight to know that you are loved by the greatest lover in all the world, by the God of heaven and earth that speaks to you as my child, my beloved, by Jesus who has joined his life with ours forever, who is not ashamed to be known as our brother.

24:53

When we know now that there is no condemnation in Christ, I may live with confidence today because even in the face of my own weakness and failures, even in the face of disease, death, war, betrayal, collapse, discouragement, and that love has joined me to brothers and sisters who are now my first family.

25:15

As Paul writes to the church in Philippi, he who has begun a good work in you will complete it.

25:25

And then John adds this line, as he is, so are we to be in this world. Dare we be animated by the love that he has given to us, his love visible in us. More on this in a moment, but it's important that we think of the love that we share in all of our relationships as real, but incomplete. We must not be surprised when the object of our human love cannot bear the weight of all that our love longs to hold in fullness and completeness.

25:57

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul closes his great song of love by reminding us of our human dilemma. We know only in part, we see only in part. The love we share is real, but incomplete as we wait to be seen and known by the one before whom one day we will stand face to face. A shared grounded, shared love grounded in the love of God points amidst the incompleteness of this life.

26:27

to the completeness of all of our longings that will be realized in the completion of creation and the fullness of redemption that is certain as the table declares because Christ is risen.

26:45

Thirdly, John tells us that our love is to be lived. This is love, that we walk in obedience to his command. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. So having received God's love by grace through faith, and God having accomplished his loving purpose by rescuing and redeeming us, what's next?

27:14

Well, God has loved us and rescued us and redeemed us that we might love as he loves and that we might love what he loves. As he is. So are we to be in this world. Paul writes in his first letter to the Church of Corinth, for the love of Christ controls us or compels us.

27:41

Because we've concluded this, that one has died, therefore all have died, and he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised. His love given to us is to flow through us just as the blood of Jesus in love flowed into the soil of the earth. And as Jesus was poured out as a drink offering, so our lives in the hands of our Savior

28:09

are to be poured out into the world, into the lives of our family and friends and neighbors, into the creation given to us as our home, who may or may not love us in return.

28:24

We as his people are now the temple of God in the world. Living stones, as Peter says, mortared together from every tribe and tongue and nation. The love of God now inhabits our life together so that we might be a city set on a hill, a lamp placed on a stand, a visible presence of God upon the earth and within our communities that we might advance his mission in the world. That is that we might love the world as God has loved the world, as Jesus has loved the world.

28:53

laying down his life for us. The love of Christ compels us, that is, it grips us so that it squeezes the character of God out of us like toothpaste out of a tube.

29:10

What does the love of God animating our life together look like when people see this city set on a hill, this light set on a stand? What do they see?

29:23

about us suggests three things. First is humility.

29:33

C.S. Lewis writes in the four loves.

29:38

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Is that not a characteristic of humility? I think it is. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will be rung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping your heart intact, you must give it to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it up.

30:03

carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries, avoid all entanglements, lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken. It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.

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To love is to be vulnerable, and I would suggest to be humble.

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There is nothing about Christian love that seeks control. And this is something that we must push back against this very popular notion today, this kind of politicized, theologized quest for power that is a corruption of the kingdom of God and that is antithetical to the love of God. Love does often make hard choices, not in pride.

31:05

but always with a heart that's willing to be broken. The love of God is not a way to protect ourselves, but instead opens the door of hospitality with the invitation of Jesus, come, come to my table, come and feast.

31:24



When people see the love of God among us, what do they see? I think they also see unity. This is what Jesus prays for in John 17. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. That's the apostles and us. That all of them may be one.

31:48

Father, just as you and I, you are in me and I am in you.

31:54

May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, so that they may be brought to complete unity. And then, then, then the world will know that you sent me.

32:16

and have loved them even as you have loved me. You may think in our weekly prayer here when we pray for another church in Ithaca or other churches in the Presbytery that that's just kind of a routine. No, it's not. It's an essential discipline for us to practice what the love of Christ, the love of God in us looks like that we say of another fellowship. Praise God.

32:41

that the Word of God is being proclaimed and the people of God are being gathered and encouraged to serve.

32:49

D.A. Carson says that the church is not a gathering of natural friends. That would be a club. But to the contrary, it's made up of natural enemies. We are the tribes at war in the book of Judges doing what is right in our own eyes. We are the church in Corinth torn apart by tribalism.

33:14

blind to the sin in our midst, idolizing the belief that we're right, a self-centered self-righteousness as we step over the poor on our way to the table, as James accuses us. Among the many things that could divide us, we turn toward one another in love. In this family, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, rich or poor, red or blue.

33:41

That is, racial, political, economic, and class distinctions carry no weight here. Men and women and children, immigrants and citizens, strangers and friends are honored mutually.

33:53

The love of God must be powerful if it is able to conquer our idolatry and lovelessness, pride and selfishness, and how desperately we must need the intercession of the spirit groaning on our behalf.

34:08

praying.

34:12

What do people see?

34:15

Thirdly, think, I pray that they see our generosity.

34:22

C.S. Lewis said in his great sermon, *The Weight of Glory*, next to the blessed sacrament, the most holy thing that you will see today is your neighbor, another human being bearing the image of God.

34:38

Is there a loving generosity that flows through the New Life family and that flows out into the streets of Ithaca?

34:52

Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, follow God's example, therefore his dearly loved children as people who know that they are loved by God.

35:03

Follow God's example, the example that in Christ he has set for us in teaching us how to love. Follow God's example and walk in the way of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God. And so this is how we know what love is. Verse John 3. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

35:31

If any one of you has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity for them, has no empathy or compassion for them, how can the love of God be in you?

35:44

Your children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and with truth.

35:54

So who are you?

35:59

What do you love?

36:02

Our human desires reveal our incompleteness, but the answer is not to kill desire. No, the answer is for us to direct our desires. In Him we live and move and have our being. He is the center, pulling us toward Him so that our lives and all things orbit around Him. To love well means that we are constantly being reformed, reshaped, more deeply influenced by His love. We live among people who are animated by love, deep longings that we share.

36:33

but we too easily and too often look for love in all the wrong places. We give our loyalty to the things that we love and we make tremendous sacrifices hoping that these loves will reward us.

36:48

Augustine said, what you will, that is what you choose, is what you love. And it's true, every choice that we make expresses what we love. And when we look at the sum of our choices, we can see what we love the most. And when we know what honors the one we love, we do those things. His commands, 10 of which we read together this morning, his commands essentially teach us how to love.

37:18

Honor your parents. He's teaching us how to love our parents. Do not kill. He's teaching us how to love each other in a way that protects one another and seeks their flourishing. Do not covet. He's teaching us how to love each other in the way that we handle our stuff, the things we cling to. And be truly glad when our neighbor has the stuff that we wish we had.

37:48

And when God's love captures us, his law is not oppressive, but it is a tutor to teach us how to love well. And so I ask you again, what do you love? This is love. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. This is love completed among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment. This is love.

38:16

that we may walk in obedience to his commands. As you've heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

38:25

Beloved brothers and sisters, let us love one another. Our love is from God.

38:35

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