

God's Love (Love 4)
Psalm 93 **Revelation 1:4b-8**

For the last for four weeks we have been exploring the theme of love, specifically God's love.

I spoke to you about the greatest commandment, the greatest gift and finally, last week, the love fueled community. Today, we'll bring that all together in our final week, focusing on God's love.

Now the idea of God's love is not something new to you if you have been around the Christian faith for very long. It is a cornerstone of what we believe: God LOVES each and everyone of us. There is not one person today who will hear my voice or read my words who is not deeply, passionately loved by God.

Let me state that in a different way, there is nothing you have said or done, nothing you have forgotten to do, nothing about you that can separate you from God's love. You are NOT loved because of who you are, what you own or what you do. You are simply loved. And because of that love, you are invited to respond.

That astounding fact is a stumbling block to those who look at the Christian faith from the outside. The God of all Creation, Maker of Heaven and Earth, Omnipotent and Omnipresent God, THAT God, loves ME? Unconditionally? For some, the only response is: "Unbelievable".

I feel sorry for them. But that brings us to today, the height of God's love.

Here we are, Christ the King Sunday. This is where it all ends...and all begins.

There are many reasons that today is of special significance in the Christian church. It is the last day of our year; next Sunday begins Advent, the start of a new year. It is the Sunday we proclaim as Christ the King Sunday. We do that because it is the day when the faithful affirms the universal and eternal rule and reign of Christ as Lord and King of all creation.

In effect, then, this day is a bit of a paradox. On one hand, today is about anticipating the eventual return someday of Jesus Christ. But it is also about acknowledging the Christ who is already here and whose rule and reign governs our very lives in the present moment.

In other words, we live in the tension between the Christ who is to come again and the Christ who is already here.

If that sounds a bit confusing, it doesn't need to be; it is our job to live in BOTH expectation and responsibility:

To live in the hope, the expectation of the establishment of God's kingdom through Christ, and to live in the present reality of our day to day world of seeking and doing the work of Christ in our day and time. We are called to live with eyes fixed on the future and hands active in the present.

That says a lot about our lives, doesn't it? Hoping for the future even as we are working for the present.

This is all too easy to disappear if we make the mistake of reading our text from Revelation today as ONLY a predictive word and think of it as only speaking about the future. That mistake also leads to apathy and laziness in the face of the problems of the world today.

I've heard it and I'm sure you have as well...if today is horrible, it's OK, Jesus will come eventually and sort it all out. Lazy. Apathetic. **Not My Problem!**

Not My Problem faith. Really? And yet, people believe that. I guess it's comforting because it means what ever goes wrong, it's someone else's fault. Maybe God's? That sure takes us off the hook!

After all, if you believe that all the violence and chaos in the world are merely signs of the end times, as "wars and rumors of wars," then why in the world would the church want to stop it? If we believe mounting crises in the environment, global poverty, AIDS, Ebola, refugee displacement and sufferings of all kinds are simply part of the end game of human history, they why try to fight it?

Or, worse yet, shouldn't we try to hurry it up?

The problem with this train of thought is that we miss God. God has not called the church to be spectator of global chaos. Instead, we are called to be agents of love, healing, hope, and justice, over and against the forces of evil and destruction.

Let me say that again...it is CRITICAL to who we are as Christians: We are called to be agents of love, healing, hope, and justice, over and against the forces of evil and destruction. Notice the words left out: judges, those who would identify who God hates, those who would treat ANY of God's children as less valuable than others.

The community to which Revelation was written was a community under intense persecution by the Roman Empire. They were people who died as a result of their profession of faith in Christ, who had to meet in seclusion, gather in fear, and live out their commitment as disciples of Christ under threat of death.

The very book itself, Revelation, had to be written in a veiled language to enable it to slip by the guards, and that language acknowledges the terror of the empire, naming Caesar, the roman military, and the government establishment with colorful, terrifying language.

But it is important, no, more than that, it is CRITICAL to recognize that in contrast to this vivid imagery there is a simple theme that runs throughout the book to the young Christian church: Don't give up! Hope is coming. Victory will be yours in the end. Have patience. Endure suffering. Persevere.

If we take the time to read Revelation in that light, this misunderstood book become less a book about the end of time and more a word of comfort for disciples in all times.

Times like then. Times like now.

In a time when demonic forces of violence, injustice, and oppression assault us from all sides, in a time when we are tempted to mute our convictions about peace and forgiveness, and when prophetic words of justice and social change become muffled, this final book of the Bible calls the church to persevere as witnesses to Christ's gift of love.

Revelation has a stirring, challenging word for today's church and today's Christians: Do you identify more with the persecuted church or the Roman persecutors? Are you in a position of privilege, prestige, and self-made power, or are you in the position of self-sacrificial, self-giving love?

Christ the King...He who came as the ultimate Gift from a loving God, makes it clear.

Christ the King; the lover of the poor, the widowed, the diseased, the imprisoned, the lost, the hopeless, the hapless and the helpless.

Christ the King who came not to the rich but to the poor, not to the powerful but to the powerless, not to demand adulation and service but to serve.

Christ the King, the Gift of God, the final sacrifice; once and for all, purifying us, releasing us from all sin-debt, SHOWING us that we are blessed.

The final statement on the last day of the Christian Year: The statement of God's love, both the affirmation of God's love today and yet to come.

A message so simple we fail to understand how life changing, earth shattering it really is:

God loves you.

Amen