



Sermon preached by Ken Rathje on 21st November 2021

Readings: Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14; Revelation 1.4b-8; John 15.9-17

The Love of Jesus

Good morning, What a real pleasure it is to be with you here today!

Would you please join me in prayer.

Loving Father, who loved us before the foundation of the world, look down upon us with merciful eyes, forgive us and be with us, mend our brokenness with your healing hand, and give us your wisdom to lead others to the knowledge that Jesus loves us so much that He died for us, to get us in a right relationship with You. We ask that Your Resurrection Spirit be upon us and our families for generations to come. And we ask all of this in the name of Your Holy Son and our friend, Jesus Christ. Amen

As this Liturgical Year comes to an end, and a New Year starts next Sunday with Advent, I want to use the next few minutes to discuss the Love of **Christ Jesus**, or in other words **King Jesus**, who reigns in heaven above, and on earth.

And even more so, He is a **King that loves us**, and... a **King** who is also our **Friend**...who asks us to **BE STILL and Know that He is God** as it says in Psalm 46:10.

Have you have every really contemplated this? Chewed on it...meditated on it?

I know I have.

I read once that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only story where the hero dies for the villain.

C.S. Lewis once said, "Though our feelings come and go, God's love for us does not".

A.W. Tozer, a Pastor and Theologian also said, "Jesus Christ knows the worst about you, Nonetheless, He is the one who loves you the most".

And as we just discussed, Anna B. Warner, and her sister Susan, who lived on Constitution Island in the Hudson across from West Point and taught Sunday School for the Cadets back in the Mid-1800's, wrote about this love in the Song, Jesus Loves Me. It's so simple, but yet one of the most beloved songs for kids and adults to this day.

What is your Love Story with Jesus?

It is clear to us Christians that Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice for us, in that He died for our sins.

Who does that? Who dies for all of mankind so we can live eternally with Him and His Father in heaven?

I think only the Son of the Ever Living God, Christ Jesus!

And this is what we call an Agape Love.

It is so clear to us Christians that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, where He sits in the marvelous Glory of His Father, so that we too may have eternal life with Him and His Father, through our faith in Him. And This is Grace.

We didn't earn it; He just gave it to us.

And we can be "Still" in knowing this, in knowing that He is a Loving God who sacrificed Himself for us.

So, let's dig into the scripture today a little deeper.

The Gospel of John really seems to invite comparisons of the other Gospels and as one Theologian once said, "the Gospel of John reveals the soul of Jesus". It is really a work of art in the world of ancient literature, and it is a favorite of both mystics and philosophers because it appeals to both the heart and mind. It was written after the other 3 Synoptic Gospels and most traditional theologians attribute the **first** author of this Gospel as the Beloved John, the brother of James, and son of Zebedee.

The Gospel of John usually has an **eagle** as its symbol because it is **truly** a Gospel that Soars.

It is often discussed by Theologians as having two parts.

One part, the Book of Signs found in Chapters 1 – 12, and the Second part, the Book of Glory found in Chapters 13 – 20.

Today's text is right in the middle of the Second part, the Book of Glory, when Jesus is telling the disciples about the True love of His Father, and about His own love for them, and about His love for all those who believe in the Father.

In this part of the Book of John, Jesus even tells the disciples that He will send them help, the Holy Spirit, as He pleads to His Father to watch over all of them and all future believers as well. And that includes us!

That includes us.

Plus, He gives His disciples a "new commandment" of loving one another as He first loved us. **In other words, it's not just the belief that secures our eternal life as it says in John 3:16;**

but also, the action of loving Him, and others likewise, that teaches us "how" to live.

John's Gospel has more to say about love than the other 3 Gospels combined. The word "love" occurs well over 50 times in the Gospel. The word love is mentioned 9 times in the verses of our text today alone.

As I re-read John 15: 9-17 specifically, listen to how much Jesus loves us.

“9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

16 You did not choose me, but I chose you...

...You did not choose me, but I chose you...

...and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”

What a love story! (((Can I get an AMEN? AMEN)))

So, know this, Jesus loves you.

And He wants us to love one another.

I don't really know what to add to this story. Except that **we can find peace in His Love, and we can be still** in knowing this.

The Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, foretold of Jesus coming amidst story after story of the good and bad of generations leading up to our Savior's arrival. And after the 4 Gospels, come the New Testament and Pauline letters, and they tell us story after story of just how hard it is to accept this truth.

It's ok if we don't get it right all the time. As it says in Romans 3:23 **that, "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God".**

But, we have forgiveness, and we have a continued challenge in Following Jesus.

So hear this today, **Jesus laid down His life for His friends, which is you and me. And knowing this makes it just a little easier to be Still and Keep the Faith, doesn't it?!**

I knew a man once who was in the dark night of his soul, the pit of despair. He had lost everything, his wife, his money, his house, his kids, most of his friends, his health, etc., but he never lost his faith. Somehow, he managed to keep his faith.

One night when he couldn't sleep at 2 in the morning, he began to read the psalms. He had heard the early believers did this, so he thought it would help him too. And he began to read psalms like he had never read them before. He read psalms of joy, and psalms of desperation. He even read psalms written by David when he was in his own pit of despair, and he learned that he wasn't alone.

He started to see others in a different light too. A light of love and hope. He read that David, and others in the Bible, made it out of their pit of despair because they trusted God and they repented.

And God brought this man out of his pit of despair.

And He can bring us out too.

You see, once we have accepted Jesus as our personal savior, He never leaves us.

He never leaves us.

Sure, we can walk away, but He is waiting with open arms **for us**, to pull us up out of that pit. And He wants to be in **your heart** and **in your life**, to give you **peace and joy**. His Peace and Joy.

Have you accepted Jesus into your heart today? Have you ever accepted Jesus into your heart? Do you want to feel the Agape love that surpasses all human understanding? To be Still and feel that refreshing light of love and joy and hope, especially during the upcoming Advent Season?

Once when my Dad was young and my brother and I were about 7 or 8 years old, he bought a boat in a Lake Community in Michigan. That first day was an amazingly beautiful day with a very calm lake. We helped push it close to shore and my Dad threw the anchor on the beach, actually dug it in a bit. But, that night was one of the worst storms in the history of that area. At about 3 in the morning the thunder cracked and woke my Dad up. He went to the front window and couldn't see the boat anymore. He put on a pot of coffee and drank about 12 cups waiting for it to get light enough for us to go find the boat. He finally saw it about a mile away banging against a break-wall. He got me and my brother up and we rode down to get the damaged boat. We sized it up and saw that it was still operable. So, my Dad jumped aboard, and my younger brother and I were on each side in the back ready to give her a push as my Dad started the engine. My dad said to push and "Jump aboard" as he started to put it into drive. I jumped up, over the railing and onto the boat. But in an instant, my Dad and I looked at each other and saw my brother John was missing. My Dad jumped to the rear of the boat, reached down and grabbed my brother who was slipping below the water and pulled him up over the railing, unto the safety of the boat and into our loving arms...

...as we then began to power through high waves in a broken boat.

It was a startling real event that my brother and I have often discussed.

That hand reaching overboard to grab us as we are going under the pressures of life, and saving us in an instant, is possible, even as we face new challenges, He promises to never leave us. It is possible for me, and for you to be Still and accept His loving embrace!

Today, like every day, is a decision point. Do you accept the loving arms of the Father? Do you accept Jesus Christ into your heart? Will you allow the Holy Spirit to do wonders in your soul and in your life?

I recommend that you decide today to BE STILL, and Know that Christ Jesus is King...and accept Him as your personal savior, **even if you have already, do it again, and again, and again, each day accept Him into your heart.** Because I want you to feel His love all around you and in your heart, reaching down to pull you up closer into His Father's loving arms, especially during this coming Advent Season.

It's as real as it gets! And we are thankful for this love, aren't we?!

Amen