

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Love is Perfected In Us

Epistle Lesson

1 John 4:7-21 (NRSV)

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 siblings, are liars; for those who do not love a sibling 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 siblings also.

Bible/Sermon Focus

This is the last week of our Sermon Reflection Studies on the sermon series, "Becoming Human: *Embodying Easter*." As together we have been thinking about what it means to become more human, we have also wondered and discussed grace, salvation, sanctification, and what it means to be a follower of Jesus—to orient our lives toward God's purposes as Jesus Christ did and taught us to do. We have wondered what it means to align our lives in cooperation with the Holy Spirit as each moment of life unfolds and becomes reality.

In this week's sermon we heard a new term, "teleological satisfaction." *Teleological* is a term we've discussed before in Sermon Reflection Studies. It comes from the root word *telos*. *Telos* is an ultimate objective or aim. So, when we ask, "What is the *telos* of God?" we are asking, "What is the ultimate purpose that God has for us?"

So, if something (me, you, a tree, an economic system, whatever) is doing what it is supposed to be doing in the larger scheme of things—if it is doing all within its capacity to contribute to the wellbeing of the many...that is teleological satisfaction.

When we talk about teleological satisfaction, we are likely to ask ourselves, "Then what the heck is our purpose? What is it we are called to do and be in the world? What is our capacity as individuals and, even more importantly, as a community?"

In these questions we are getting to the heart of what it means to seek the creative purposes of a follower of Jesus as we try to emulate his life and mission to bring about the Reign of God, the kingdom of God. No two people will answer the question exactly the same, and yet we should not spend our time only focusing on our individual answer. "What the heck is my purpose?" is a valid question, but "What the heck is our purpose?" is perhaps more important. Personal salvation has its place, but the Reign of God was much more the focus of Jesus' ministry.

In the words of theologian Kurt Struckmeyer, "Jesus was concerned for far more than the redemption of individuals - he wanted to redeem the very powers that shape the domination system in which we live. Jesus died for the Reign of God, and the gospel he proclaimed is a social gospel."

As we seek to understand our creative purpose as followers of Jesus, our focus should remain on building the Reign of God. Our role is to be co-workers with the Spirit and each other (who are bound together by the Spirit). And as the Spirit moves, she does so while subverting the empires of the world, while re/orienting the world toward greater wholeness, the greater beauty of the Reign of God. If we are doing that, our value is complete; we are heading in the direction we are supposed to be going.

Discussion Questions

1. If being perfect isn't the same thing as being flawless, then how would you define perfect? Describe a perfect day. Describe a perfect moment. Is it flawless?
2. Reflect on this quote from Wesley scholar, Dr. Kenton Stiles, "When something fulfills its creative purpose, its value is said to be complete or whole...difference, variety, and imperfection ... should not be considered a liability. Rather, they help to orient the world toward the goal of greater aesthetic wholeness and toward beauty and unity within diversity."
3. What is the "creative purpose" of a follower of Jesus?
4. Reflect on this quote from Kurt Struckmeyer, "Jesus was concerned for far more than the redemption of individuals - he wanted to redeem the very powers that shape the domination system in which we live. Jesus died for the Reign of God, and the gospel he proclaimed is a social gospel."
5. Where do you think that Manchester UMC could work on the "development" phase of justice in cooperation with other entities (private sector, other non-profits, governmental entities)? Or should we not?

Prayer

Spirit of the Living God, we acknowledge your active movement in the world. We ask that we become more aware of your gentle nudging and gracious, grace-filled guidance. God, we want to do your will. Perfect us in our capacity. Help our days be your days. Help us live in a spirit of thanksgiving, grateful to walk this journey with each other and with you. Guide our church. Let our mission be your mission. Amen.