

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Easter 7 May 24, 2009 1 John 4:16b through 21



God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the Day of Judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Talk about love – and most people think of something like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* – Act 2 Scene 2. "But soft. What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east and Juliet is the sun. Arise fair sun and kill the envious moon who is already sick and pale with grief that thou her maid art far more fair than she!" It's a tragedy – the Capulets and the Montagues and their forever feuding! The authorities clear the market place in the very beginning with that famous line, "On pain of death all men depart!" I always liked that, too. "On pain of death, all men depart!" It's all very dramatic. "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!" You don't hear people talk like that very much in real life – and more is the pity! Why don't we talk like that to each other? It takes thought and effort. That's partly why. Most of the time we are thinking about what we want – what pleases and satisfies us. We are so busy seeing the things we don't like – so busy being frustrated by what isn't the way we want it – we don't notice the beauty right there in front of us! How sad is that? This 7th and last Sunday of Easter – this Sunday after Ascension – this weekend when our nation celebrates Memorial Day God's Word is again very simple and to the point. God's Word says:

God Is Love

- 1. Jesus loves us first**
- 2. Jesus enables us to love one another**

The apostle John – the disciple Jesus loved – wrote about God's forgiving love. What more powerful announcement of God's love that this? **How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are!** From the Sunday after Easter through the Sunday after Ascension we have been reading from First John. We have been reading again and again – in the afterglow of Easter about how much Jesus loves us. This is both the reason and the power to love God and to love one another. **God is love!**

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. Have you ever been afraid – of your boss? When I was in high school I worked in a grocery store – a supermarket – a Jewel food store. "*Pleasant shopping with friendly people!*" That was our motto! For a while our store manager was a guy named Ken. Ken liked to cruise the store checking up on his workers. You could be *facing* – that's a grocery store term – *facing* meant going through an aisle – and pulling everything forward – pulling all the cans of soup forward – stacking them at the front edge of the shelf – so that the shelves looked absolutely packed with groceries – so that you can pick them up and put them in your cart. You would be

moving all the boxes of cereal forward – when you could get that funny feeling someone was watching you! Stop and look over your shoulder – and there would be Ken – about 10 feet behind you – watching – just watching! *Yikes!* He would smile – and without saying a word he would turn and walk away. And this is where the really *insidious* part comes in. You would think to your self – what was I doing the last five minutes? Was I working really hard – moving groceries as fast as I could or not? And this is just about the time you would get that funny feeling you were being watched again. Oh, that can't be. Ken was just here. Surely he's gone on to check on someone else. And that's where you would be wrong. What Ken liked to do was seem to walk away – pretend to walk away – and in about 15 seconds he would be back – unannounced – watching – just watching. Look over your shoulder – there he was again! It was not a little scary! It got to be – you were forever looking over your shoulder. Paranoid wouldn't be too strong a word. Once you saw him – you knew it was only a matter of moments and he would be back! It was like he was everywhere! That's not good. And that's not how our Heavenly Father treats us. Jesus is not some inspector with a clipboard – trying to catch you in a mistake! He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked! Jesus loves you. He knows all your sins – and forgives them – every one!

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. The history of brotherly love in the Bible is not a very good one. Consider the first brothers in the world. Cain and Abel. They both claimed to love their Heavenly Father. Remember – they both brought sacrifices. Cain brought sacrifices from the produce of the field – grain, vegetables, fruits! Abel brought sacrifices from his flocks – sheep and goats. The Great I AM was pleased with Abel's offerings. It was like they smelled sweet – the smoke from the meat that was all burned up. But there was something seriously wrong with Cain's offering. I am very confident the problem wasn't the quality nor the quantity of the grain and fruits and vegetables – although that's possible. He might have brought skimpy amounts – and they might have been a little bit overripe or a little bruised. But doubtless – the real problem was Cain's heart. That's where the trouble always starts – in the heart. If your heart isn't right – you might as well keep your offering – because you can't buy off God. God isn't worried about your envelope. God wants your heart. God wants your life. God wants all of you – not your things and stuff! Not your things and stuff! It went so badly in Cain's heart that he murdered his brother – killed him. The first recorded murder was brother against brother. And Abel's blood cried out to God in Heaven. How this must have cause heart ache in Adam and Eve's heart – an ache that didn't go away until they went home to heaven. You know they named their next son Seth – which literally means to replace the one we lost! How sad is that?

Brother's in the Bible – like Isaac and his half brother Ishmael. Their moms didn't get along and they didn't either. Then there was Jacob and Esau. They didn't get along before they were even born. Inside their mother Rebecca's tummy they were pushing and shoving and even kicking each other before they were even born. Jacob was grabbing on to his brother Esau's heel when he was born. And after they were born they didn't get along... The day came when Esau wanted to murder his brother Jacob. And if he could have found him – he would have killed him – with his bare hands he would have killed him. Many years later Jacob-Israel had lots of sons – a dozen sons. And they didn't get along either. Again – a good amount of the blame was on Israel – because he played favorites. You would think people would not repeat the mistakes of the past generation – again and again – painful sinful hurtful mistakes. But they do! Everybody knew that daddy's favorite was Joseph – Joseph and his coat of many colors – or his

coat with big sleeves – his coat that he could wear and literally twirl around and around – daddy likes me best! Second place – that was easy. Second place was Benjamin. Daddy liked Joseph best – and if he wasn't there to spoil – here's a treat for Benjamin. The brothers hated Joseph so much they were going to kill him – I mean literally murder him. And if it hadn't been for the slave traders – sent by the LORD at just the right moment – they would have killed him. Instead the brothers took Joseph's clothes – ripped them to shreds – soaked them in goat's blood – and told their father a wild animal must have eaten Joseph. They were willing to put their father through that kind of grief and mourning – they hated Joseph so much. Earthly brothers in the Bible hated each other. And that kind of hatred blocks out love for your Heavenly Father. God's Word is very simple and to the point.

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. Your brother is your technical brother. I have one brother – I call him Uncle Terry – the uncle of my children. I grew up with Terry. He is two years younger than I am. His birthday is March 3rd. His favorite color is orange. He likes ice cream. He fills a bowl with ice cream – then pours milk on it – and stirs it up so it's kind of like a malt at Mullen's. My brother is not a drummer – he's a percussionist. He will pound on or beat on or shake anything to make a rhythmic sound. When we were little – Uncle Terry used to bring his drum sticks in the car to practice. He would practice twirling his drum sticks. When he wasn't very good at it – he could put your eye out! Uncle Terry and I took piano lessons together. He was very very good! He has played the piano professionally. I play at nursing homes. There – if you play loudly – they confuse that with playing well. Uncle Terry practices a lot – me – not so much! I love my brother and I love my sister. I have one of each. I love my brothers-in-law and my sisters-in-law, too. They all have little quirks! Little habits – that are borderline – obsessive compulsive. They do. Uncle Terry is very concerned about security – like did you lock the door? Are you sure? Did you pull on it to make sure? Maybe we should go back and check – just to be sure? Do you have the keys? Are you sure? Where are the keys? In your pocket? Really? You're sure? Good! You have the keys! Good! Just checking. You can't be too careful you know! We've decided to consider these things fun. Once in a while – you can stop – pat all your pockets and say – I lost the keys! Do you have them? I can't find the keys! And then – just before he panics – you say – oh, I found them. He says, "That's not funny!" And I can say – "Oh, it's a little bit funny – it is!" Jesus fills our heart with love for our technical brother and sister. And Jesus fills our heart with love for brothers and sisters in Christ. That would be all of us. The LORD is in deadly earnest – when he says very simply and clearly – you can't say you love God – whom you haven't even seen – if you can't love your earthly brother and sister. We talk about this every time we pray the Lord's Prayer. Think about it. *Forgive us our sins – our trespasses – as we forgive those who sin – those who trespass against us!* If we pray the Lord's Prayer – we need to forgive everyone who sins against us! I'm not saying it's easy. But it is possible. Again Jesus shows us how. Just think how the Roman soldiers literally hammered nails through Jesus' hands and feet. And what did Jesus pray? **Father forgive them for they know not what they do!** Humanly speaking – you could make a pretty good case – they did know! Some of them did. Some of the chief priests – the Pharisees and Sadducees and the teachers of the law who had been plotting Jesus' death for years – literally years – knew in their heart of hearts who Jesus was. And still they hated him. And still Jesus pray for them. That his Heavenly Father would have mercy on their immortal souls. When was there ever love like this? When Jesus tells us to love and forgive one another he isn't asking us to do anything that he didn't do first and best!

God is love! “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.” Do you know that line from Sonnets from the Portuguese? Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote that – back in the early 1800s. “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.” Do you know the ways? Most people only know that first part. *“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach, when feeling out of sight for the ends of Being and ideal Grace. I love thee to the level of everyday’s most quiet need by sun and candle-light. I love thee freely, as men strive for Right; I love thee purely as they turn from Praise. I love thee with a passion put to use in my old griefs and with my childhood’s faith. I love thee with a love I seemed to lose with my lost saints – I love thee with the breath smiles, tears of all my life!* Wow! That’s a lot of love! And the woman who wrote that – Elizabeth Barrett Browning – was not a Sports Illustrated swim suit model. She had a broken body – small and weak and frail. But that’s ok – when you remember that love is first and foremost from the heart and from the mind. The love that God’s Word talks about today – the powerful Gospel truth that God is love – is a matter of faith – a gift of God – worked by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. God is love – and that forgiving love changes everything. It changes our life and it changes eternity! Amen!

To God alone all glory!