

## Love Breathes Life Into Faith

*1 John 4:4-17*

This week, before I went to New York City to see my son Andrew, and then off to Boston to see my father, on Tuesday, I performed a wedding. And I was pleasantly surprised to remember that the Call to Worship at our weddings is actually the verse John wrote as the centerpiece of the passage I just read to you this morning. This is what he wrote, he said, *“This is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”* And the heart of what he’s getting at is that before love can do anything else, before the warmth and healing and encouragement and joy that we all want from love can happen, love has to show up.

Because there is a world of warmth and healing and encouragement and joy stored up in the heart of God for all of us to live on, but for any of it to reach us God had to come our way first. None of us were headed for him! In our fallen condition, we are so caught up with what we need and want and must do that none of us would have the time of day for God unless he first made some move toward us. So God did. And quite a move it was.

He sent his Son, not on a visit, no singing telegram, no flowers on the front stoop. God sent his Son to become one of us, born the way we’re born, grown up the way we grow up, loved by some, hated by others, hot, tired, hungry, thirsty, lonely, joyful, happy, funny, just like we can be. Only Jesus was God in the flesh the entire time. No sin, no selfishness, no laziness or indulgence or tantrums. He lived out the love that God has, the love that God is, and then he completed the mission by standing in and accepting for us the wrath and guilt and shame that all our sins deserve.

Jesus showed up where we needed him, when we needed him and the point of the passage is that showing up is the heart of what love does. Warmth counts. Encouragement and constructiveness and kindness and forgiveness is important. But none of it can come into play unless we have first shown up where God sent us to be, and done what he called us to do and been what love required of us in a given moment. And all this is much more an art than a science.

But the point of this morning’s passage is that we can’t learn the art unless we’ve first shown up. To love us, Jesus needed to come here, where we are, to grow up and learn to God’s law and visit his Father’s house. Just like we have to do, if we’re going to know and love God, and be the blessing to other people God wants us to be. We have to show up when and where God’s people worship him, when and where God’s people take the field to build his kingdom and make times and space for other people to come and know and love and follow Christ.

Love requires being present, reporting for duty, worshiping when and where the Church worships, serving when and where the Church serves, giving to people and causes that God's people together believe in and support, like the Salvation Army Kettle Drive, and Operation Christmas Child and Keep Evans Warm. That's why John taught us a month ago, *Little children let us not love in word or talk, but deed and truth.*" In other words, we have to make like Jesus and show up. That's why John teaches us today, *"Beloved, if God has 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."*

If God has so loved us, John began, by which he means that if Christ grew up in a dusty little village and learned a trade and took up with a workman's potpourri of disciples, men and women both, if Christ so loved us as to become hot when we're hot, and tired when we're tired, and sad when we're sad, if he so loved us as to bear our guilt and shame and failures on a Cross, loving and forgiving us the entire time, if that's how Christ loved us, then that's how we ought to love each other.

The point being that real love involves our both being there, for and with each other, and making the sacrifices that have to be made so that all of us together can be whole and forgiven and loved enough so that warmth and encouragement and joy and fun can come into play.