



Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

“How Love (the Gospel) and a Commandment (Law)

Work Together” – 1 John 3:16-24

4th Sunday of Easter – Good Shepherd Sunday – April 22, 2018

Pastor Chip Winter

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Epistle appointed for the day and already read for us from 1 John in the third chapter.

My dear family in Christ, again this week we have a coupling of very different words or concepts. Last week we began with “Disbelief and Joy” before moving on to “Repentance and Joy”. They don’t appear to go together, but in the majesty of God’s grace there are those links for which we are eternally thankful – as repentance leads to faith which results in redemption and a joy that knows no ending.

This week it is the joining, by St. John the Apostle, of “Love” with “Commandment” or of the Gospel with the Law. We know the Law. It tells us what we can and cannot do. It shows us our sin as it always accuses. We know the Gospel. It tells us what God has done for us and for our salvation. It is clearly seen as an expression of God’s love. These two doctrines, Law and Gospel, move in very different directions. How do they work together?

Again, the Gospel is that verbalization of the self-sacrificing love of God for our well-being. We see this chiefly in the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. Such love moves us, then, into the brotherly love we have for our dear friends and the physical love we have in meeting peoples' needs and especially in the love of marriage.

But the Law is also an expression of love as we hold one another accountable. The Law and its keeping safeguard the well-being of society. And finally, as God corrects us with His law and moves us to the cross of Christ, we discipline our kids out of love, training them up to be contributing members of society and, God-willing, successful in this world. **"Honor your father and your mother, that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."** The fourth commandment points to the practicality of obeying discipline.

In fact, St. John makes the point that if we don't follow God's precepts in caring for those around us – following His commands – God's love is not present. It is, as the Lutheran Women's Missionary Leagues has long put it, **"Our hands that works for Him, our feet that go on His errands, our voices which sing His praises, our lips which proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold which extend His kingdom and our wills that do His will."**

We are to love others not simply in word or talk but in deed and in truth (v18). It was James, the brother of our Lord, who put it this way. **¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good^[b] is that?**

Our recent "Diapers for Dollars" campaign is an example of faith making itself known in works. Instead of simply saying that we want to support local young mothers with little children in their time of great need, instead of saying that we want people from faraway places to learn of the

love of God for them in Jesus Christ, we put those desires into action. Diapers were collected for Birthright of Norfolk and the number of diapers collected was used to give a contribution of dollars to the Malawi Mission in which we take part – helping Malawi Students attending Northeast Community College and assisting the mission trip planned for a few weeks from now when teaching and Vacation Bible School will be shared with the people of Malawi.

Speaking of James, as I was but a lengthy paragraph ago, but of a different one, James Nicholas Winger, who is being baptized on this weekend: I imagine his older sister, Grace, his mom, Angela and his dad, Matt, will tell him often that they love him dearly. But won't they do more? Of course they will! They and their families are here to bring him to the font, to introduce James to the Lord Who has made him and now further remakes him by calling him to faith. They will feed James and clothe James. They will educate James and bring him to worship. They will teach him to pray at their meals, they will have devotions with him.

Now that's an easier concept to adopt when it's a dear child or someone less fortunate. But there is the temptation that, to love any further it's got to be a kind and pleasant person, someone easy to love, or perhaps someone whose friendship could be useful in the future.

Dr. Martin Luther says that this is not the love that God is commanding. **“Accordingly, John does not say: ‘Let us love those who are saintly agreeable, and rich.’ No, he says: ‘Let us love the brethren,’ ins such a way that then nothing but the brotherhood is loved and regarded; for a brother is loved out of a sense of duty, not because of usefulness and not because of praise. All the gifts we have should serve those who do not have them. For example, he who is learned should serve him who is not learned; he who is rich should serve him who is poor; he who is sensible should serve him who is foolish, etc.”** (AE 30:278-279)

The love of God and the commandment of God, the Gospel message and the law work together when it is the love of God, patterned for us, that is foremost on our minds and hearts. The love that we often heard extolled at weddings is described in 1 Corinthians 13. When we hear **Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

⁸ Love never ends. What we are hearing is the love God has shared with us.

This is the God Who created us, the One against Whom we have rebelled and sinned, blasphemed and profaned. And yet He is the One Who sent His Son, Jesus, to be the author and perfecter of our faith through His paradigmatic obedience and His passion, death and resurrection by which we have been reconciled to God now and forever. It is by the power of the cross and the empty tomb that we are able to forgive and to love one another. We receive that love and we pass it along – that is the way the love of God is known to be alive and well in us and in the world.

If I were to ask you the two main, most famous bodies of water in the Holy Land, what would you guess? You'd most likely say to me “**The Sea of Galilee or Sea of Tiberias**” and “**The Dead Sea.**”

The Sea of Galilee is where many of Jesus' disciples had previously made their living. They were fishermen. They were the ones whose nets were overflowing with the catch of the day when they heeded their Lord and cast the nets on the other side of the boat. They were the one rowing furiously against the storm until at one time Jesus awoke and hushed the storm or, at another time, Jesus walked by on the water and did the same. The Sea of Galilee resembles, in some respects, the Houghton Lake in Michigan, not the least of which is that they are both alive with fish to catch.

The Dead Sea, on the other hand: what do you know of it? Its saline content is such that (a) you can float on it with ease. In fact, it's nearly impossible to dive below the surface. Also (b) nothing lives in it. How did such salt come to be there – killing life and creating fantastic buoyance – and not in the Sea of Galilee?

It's because the Sea of Galilee is fed and the Sea of Galilee has its waters exit and go further south as the Jordan River. The Dead Sea, on the other hand, only receives water – it does not pass one drop along to any other place. That's why it is dead and Galilee is alive – Galilee is only a reservoir, a pass through for the waters on to another locale.

That's what helps to keep the love of God alive among us, St. John says. That love, which we have received and in which we live by faith, is to be passed along to others, in both words and actions. It is not meant to end with us, but showing the life and power of God's love, it is meant to flow through us to all those around us. That is the way in which the Gospel and one sense of the Law, the Love of God and the Command from God to love, work together. Amen.