

042918      1 John 4:7-12

LOVE 101 Sermon Series: CHURCH 101

Hope Lutheran Church

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Once in a while someone asks if pastors only work on weekends. Just to show you what we do during the week, I have a few photos to share. This took place the other day in my office.

What's Vicar Caleb holding there on the left? No, it's not a big cooler. Let's call this "God." What is Pastor Lew holding? A chafing dish? No, this is the "church." And what's that in my hand? Not a cooking pot. Let's call this a "person in the pew ahead of you."

What happens next? What is this that's pouring out of "God" into the "church?" Let's call it "God's love." And what happens if "God's love" keeps pouring into the "church?" The "church" overflows, right? The "church" has to overflow. "God's love" has to overflow from us -- from you -- to others.

And that picture, in essence, is the message that God's Word has for us today. This is a basic, fundamental teaching for the church. As Christians, we all have to grasp this, and embrace this.

We heard the message earlier from 1 John 4. "Beloved," St. John addresses the church – not just the church back in his day, but our church today. "Let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."

Love comes from God, right? If God didn't love sinners like us with an amazing love -- if God's heart of love didn't send Jesus to be our Savior – you and I wouldn't be here. This

church wouldn't be here. Love comes from God and pours into us.

But what happens when God keeps pouring his love into us, into his church? We said it before. The church overflows. The church has to overflow. The natural result of God's awesome acts of love hitting our hearts is that his love would spill over from us. This awesome love of God that we celebrate and rejoice over every week in our church is supposed to transform and change the way Christians like us deal with people. Starting here. Starting in our church.

And this is exactly what John is talking about in our Bible lesson. "Love one another," he tells the church. This is CHURCH 101. This is essential, unavoidable stuff for the church, and for Christians. "Love one another."

John, the disciple of Jesus, didn't make this up. Jesus did. The night before his crucifixion, Jesus tells his disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." And then, he adds something really interesting. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35-36).

I wonder how many of you have ever visited a church in which the love for one another seemed to be missing? Have you ever visited a church in which you could just sense the tension and discord? Ever been to a church where people were just not friendly, where the cliques were easy to spot, where outsiders were ignored or scrutinized with suspicion? Did you want to go back to that church? I've been to churches like that, and I didn't want to go back.

When people go shopping for a new church, they often have a checklist: denominational label, traditional music, contemporary music, liturgy, no liturgy, baptism by

immersion, baptism of infants, private confession, altar calls, convenient parking, children's and youth programs, high-quality baked goods at coffee hour. And many of us think those kinds of things are vitally important, too.

But did you ever notice that the Bible doesn't exactly dictate how we should function in all of those areas? Yet the Word of God does dictate, repeatedly, that we should "Love one another." The Word of the Lord cuts through all that other stuff today, and compels us to do what's really important in the church: "Love one another."

And when we're doing that, when the overflow is happening, people notice. I'm not talking about you and me trying super hard every Sunday to be nice, or pretending to love each other. I'm talking about God's selfless, sacrificial love filling us and then simply pouring from us. When that's happening here? People notice. They sense it. Visitors want to stay.

"Love one another" is CHURCH 101.

Here at Hope, I see this kind of love happening. We're not perfect at this, and there's certainly more that we can do. But I see members of this church overflowing, spilling over with love and service and fellowship and care all the time. God's love pouring into us, and pouring from us into others.

But, we're only human. That sinful human nature of ours gets in the way. So we need to hear this command again, and take it to heart again. This is God's directive to you, to me, to his whole church. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God."

So how do we deal with that person at church who annoys us over and over? Shun? Ignore? Gossip? No. We love that person. We love that person with the love of God has for us. A love that's giving, selfless, patient, and full of grace. A love that gives second chances.

We let that love spill over from us to that person in church whose parenting techniques make us cringe, or whose political views make us crazy; to that person in our church whose taste in Christian music is so ridiculous to us, or whose lifestyle choices are so hard for us to understand. We don't have to agree with them, or condone their behavior. But we have to love them. We love those people! We love one another! We accept every single person here as a child of God, as a fellow redeemed sinner; and we let the love flow.

The church has to overflow with God's love. Sharing and spilling God's love is not what saves us or gets us into heaven. Only faith in Jesus does that. But overflowing with the love God pours into us is the natural result of faith. It's what has to happen here. "Love one another" is Christ's constant command for his church. And our God constantly enables us to live out that command, by pouring and pouring and pouring his love into our hearts. Thank the Lord for his love today, and love one another. Amen.