

## HOMILY Trinity II MP 2013

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*He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him*  
--I John iv 9-10

God is love! This thought has echoed down the Christian centuries—but it is an idea which does not come very naturally to humanity. When we speak or act for God we are prone to second-guess the divine will and do that in ways which are anything but loving. In our words and actions, we are more likely to reflect God as the stern judge and punisher of our fellow mortals, and it is this harsh image of God that makes sense to us. Is it a feeling of our own unworthiness or that of those around us, that fosters such a punitive perception of the Almighty?

The love of God remains a mystery to us; in fact, one might well ask, why should God love us? Is it because “we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand?” A clergyman of my acquaintance used to characterize sheep as “poor, stupid, stinking creatures,” and it took only one afternoon on a sheep-farm for me to see what he meant. Once you get past all the Bible’s pastoral imagery—perhaps tidied up in stained-glass or in sentimentalized color prints—the comparison of sheep with people is not at all complimentary to the human race. Perhaps we can dismiss this apparent insult off as merely an over-stated expression of our weakness and our dependence upon the good shepherd.

However, there is much more to the sheep metaphor! Sheep are willful, yet easily frightened and misled.--and these characteristics are all-too-recognizably human! *All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way.* [Isa liii:6] Since our way is often far from God’s way, we may again ask: why should God love us? Certainly not for our behavior or personalities! *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.* [I John iv:10]

Are we even capable of understanding why God should care for us? Perhaps our understanding of our situation is no better than that of a young child reflecting on the birth of a sibling:

“ Now we gotta dress and feed him, and we don’t really need him more than a frog--

Why’d they buy a baby brother, when they knowed I’d really druther have a dog!”

Since with our limited experience we cannot comprehend any reason for God’s love of us, we are left to marvel at it, and to accept it as a fact attested to in numerous New Testament passages.

Today's Epistle reading—like the one you heard last Sunday—is taken from the first Epistle of John. In this book's five short chapters, we find that love--God's love for humanity and brotherly affection among us—is at the heart of our faith:

*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. [I John iii:16] ...And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and he is the propitiation for our sins...[I John ii: 1-2]*

And, of course, these thoughts are expressed by Our Lord, himself, as recorded in John's Gospel:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. [John iii:16]*

Though we get a taste of John's teaching in our Sunday readings, the five brief chapters of I John are well-worth reading as a whole. Many of their most profound statements are both clear and thought-provoking. When we look at this book as a whole, we can see that John does not fail to notice evil wherever the love of God is not acknowledged. And he declares that such evil will "pass away." However, his emphasis rests upon Christ's sacrifice as the paramount expression of God's love and calls on us to reflect upon it.