

Chris Murphy

September 8th 2024

Scripture: 1 John 4: 7-21

Sermon Title: Experiencing God's Love

Prayer...

Introduction:

Today, I am reconnecting with all of you after a summer away on sabbatical.

As I come back, I am in the mood to preach on two topics: Peace and Love. I will start with a few Sundays focused on love and then in October, we will reflect more on peace.

I think what the church is called to do in terms of our mission is to share the peace and love of Christ with all of creation.

In a graduation speech this year at Oral Roberts University, Pastor Rick Warren made a startling statement. He said to a group of seniors graduating.

Your first purpose in life is not to love God. It is to let God love you.

People often think their problem is that they do not love God enough. Our problem is that we do not understand how much God loves us.

Warren went on to say, God loves us on our best days and on our worst days. God loves us always and God has a special heart for us when we are struggling.

This is the heart of the gospel, not that we love God, but that God loves us.

When you understand how much God loves you and really feel it, you can't help but love God.

God's love is rooted in what Christ has done for us on the cross and in his resurrection.

It's all about love. Warren finished his message by saying, "Go into the world and love the least loved people."

Friends, our church Newberg First Presbyterian Church is here to show love to people who feel the least loved. We are a Christ centered church of grace, hope, love, and peace.

I want to thank you for showing love to me this summer as I enjoyed a three-month sabbatical.

On my first Sunday back as I preach on experiencing God's love, I want to share a little bit about my sabbatical journey and how I experienced God's love.

June- In June I experienced God's love by being human, breathing deeply, and connecting especially with family. I played golf with my dad more than normal and also saw my mom and Sis. And the highlight of the month was taking my wife Karen and daughters Cate and Chiara to California for nine days. We had a blast going back to Fuller Seminary in Pasadena and seeing some friends. We visited Huntington Gardens, the LA Arboretum, and the Norton Simon Museum. We connected with our friend Sara Hailemeskel and met

her new husband Bele and their daughter Grace. It was awesome.

For our family, when we visit California and see our old home and visit the friends, restaurants, and other places of our early years as a family, something special happens. We feel a special bond with each other.

God met me in June by helping me experience love through my family.

July- The next month, in July, I had an opportunity to go to Mount Angel Monastery. This was a time for me to experience God's love through solitude, prayer, and study. I shared in the daily prayers of the monks at Mount Angel. I read a wonderful book called the Mystic Heart about the spiritual life. I met for spiritual direction with a monk named Father Aelred and he shared with me about how Catholics understand the role of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. I also took time at the monastery to do some grounding. I walked on the grass barefoot and prayed while enjoying the beauty of God's creation. If you have

never gone to Mount Angel monastery, it is a beautiful place. They also have a great coffee shop with special chocolate flavored drinks and they even have their own brewery. It was a wonderful time for me to rest in God's love.

August- In August, I took my family on a trip to Spokane, Washington. We went a campus tour at Whitworth and gathered with some friends from my Whitworth days. The highlight of my visit was taking my family to Camp Spalding, which is about an hour north of Whitworth. You may remember from my previous sermons, that Camp Spalding was where I first started working full-time in ministry. My first ministry role was to be a Drama Director at Camp for two summers. Then I was a program director and led a program based on the classic Narnia series. I also was a nature director my last summer. I was so blessed to show Camp Spalding to my family and to meet up with my friends Andy and Krisi Sonneland, who have run the camp for 30 years. I was pleased to learn that the same

simple message of inviting youth to know Jesus is the focus of the camp today.

Visiting Camp Spalding was a perfect way for me to reconnect to my ministry heart as I prepared in August to return to serving with you all this fall. My invitation to all of us is to remember that the heart of our Christian faith is to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I love that in our passage today the focus is to define God as love and to explain that God's love was revealed in the person of Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

At this stage of my life, my Christian faith is becoming more and more simple. My faith is rooted in the basic theological concept that God is love. Wherever love is shown in this world, God is present. There are no boundaries to God's love. I also push back on images of God that sometimes surface in Christian circles or other places in society, where God is viewed as violent or scary. God certainly is

strong and deserves our respect. I think when the Bible says that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10), what is being talked about is that we are respect and revere God. We are to humble ourselves before an all powerful God. But I hope we all understand that we do not really need to be afraid of God as if God is unapproachable.

God became a human being in Jesus to show God's love to the world. God in that sense is deeply safe. The passage we read today say that God does not need to be feared, because fear has to do with punishment and those that know a God of love do not need to approach God with fear. Actually, what our Scripture says quite clearly is that Love casts out fear.

I want to ask you a question.

Are you afraid of God? Do you worry that God wants to punish you for your sins. This is actually an unfortunate image of God that many people have.

May I suggest that what this Bible passage says today is that our God through his Son Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit loves you and is approachable. You do not need to be afraid of God. God is love and in Jesus we see this love fully expressed through his compassion for the poor and vulnerable, his empowerment of women and children, his incredible healing ministry.

Friends, I encourage you to image God as a loving father and mother and as a compassionate Savior. You do not need to be afraid of God because love casts out fear.

Certainly, stay humble. Put God first in your life and confess your sins to God and others, but know that God is always for you and wants to help you experience her love when you are most vulnerable, most fearful, most lost. God is love and that is really the whole story.

If you can learn to see God as love, then you will be able to walk in freedom rather than fear, in joy, and in hope, even as you also experience the sorrows of life.

Friends, our world often encourages us to walk in fear and confusion. There is much anxiety about the state of the world and this feels even more pronounced during an election season. May I boldly suggest, we do not need to be afraid of God or the state of the world, rather let us put our hope and trust in God's love and let us commit ourselves this fall to sharing the peace and love of Christ in whatever context we find ourselves in.

I know you all enjoyed a wonderful summer, where you had the opportunity to reflect on the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. Again, I am deeply grateful for Lish and Mary for guiding you in this reflection. May we now this fall continue to embody the fruit of the Spirit and to witness to the world a God of love not judgement,

not fear, not punishment. What the world needs desperately to know is that God is love.

What we need desperately to know is that God is love and more than just knowing this truth, we need to experience God's love through family, friends, nature, prayer, and through our church community here. I look forward to experiencing God's love with you and sharing God's love with our broader community. I love you all.

Let us pray...

1 John 4:7-21

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

God Is Love

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15 God

abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. 19 We love[a] because he first loved us. 20 Those who say, "I love God," and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.