

Sermon 2008 Lent midweek 2

Text: 1 John 3:11-18

Theme: Hatred and Love

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should **love** one another. [12] We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. [13] Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world **hates** you. [14] We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we **love** the brothers. Whoever does not **love** abides in death. [15] Everyone who **hates** his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. [16] By this we know **love**, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. [17] But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's **love** abide in him? [18] Little children, let us not **love** in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

When we were very little, we began to learn the way of the world. If I do the right thing I get rewarded and if I do the wrong thing I get punished. If you ate your vegetables you got dessert. If you hit your brother you got sent to your room. It did not take long for us to begin weighing the options and making decisions as to which evils we would commit because the consequences were acceptable or at least the risk of being caught was slim.

Maybe my room was not such a bad place and maybe hitting my brother would be well worth it. Maybe dessert was tapioca and since I don't really like tapioca, eating asparagus really wasn't worth it. Parents then get frustrated and try to devise

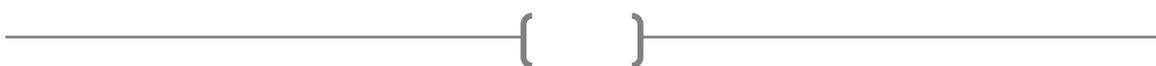


more costly punishments. They become private detectives to increase their odds and make the risk of getting caught higher. I know parents who have hidden video cameras and read diaries to try to increase their odds of catching the perpetrator. Then the kids get smarter and faster and finally someone gives up and it is usually the old ones.

That's the way the world works – not God. When God says,

“For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,” he isn't prescribing that we love one another, but rather stating a fact. He created us to love one another and hatred is alien to us. Did you ever stop to wonder why love feels so good and hate feels so bad? Have you ever loved someone and not liked the feeling? Of course not! While love might give us butterflies in our stomachs, hate gives us cramps.

So it is not that if we love one another, then we'll get something and if we hate one another, then we'll get something else. It's that we love one another...period; and that leads to all



kinds of wonderful things. Hatred is an alien interloper that climbs over the walls and destroys the love we have been given by God. Hate is like cancer, slithering into our flesh and multiplying and killing all with which it comes into contact. Hatred not only destroys our relationship with one another but with God. For the more we hate one of God's children, the further we are driven from God. Who do you have more difficulty with; someone who hates you or someone who hates your kid?

What happened between Cain and Able? Cain allowed jealousy and hatred to enter his heart. It wasn't that he failed to love enough. It was that he let hatred eat him alive and his actions were consistent with the cancer that was devouring him. Our actions will ultimately be consistent with what is in our hearts and if we allow in hate, murder will not be far behind. If we luxuriate in the warmth of God's love and let that love completely invest us until it overflows into every relationship we have, joy and peace will follow us.



Hatred or Love. It is your choice. None of us are bound to one or the other. We are not controlled by other people's actions or world situations. We cannot make enough rules to control another person's hatred or to force another to love. There is no magic bullet. It is your choice day by day. Do you choose to bottle up, divert and withhold God's love in your life – using it as a bargaining chip to try and negotiate the desired behavior or reaction? Or do you choose to let God's unrestricted love overflow in your life and into the lives of others trusting that God's love will always accomplish more than we can?

It's not a matter of just love everyone and ignore all the rules. It's a matter of love first and rules second. Rules exist only to allow greater freedom for us to of love. Love does not exist for the sake of the rules. As long as we understand what is most important, we will be fine; and if one must be sacrificed, sacrifice the rules. Never sacrifice love because love is finally all that remains. AMEN.

