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Living Out the Love of God!

A sermon on **1 John 3:16-24** & John 10:11-18

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Opening Remark: How wonderful it is to worship the Lord with the believers of *South Yarra Community Baptist Church!* We're from different parts of the world. Most of us have not met each other in person except Dr. Nathan and I, yet we can say we're all brothers and sisters in Christ! Our faith in Christ knows no boundary and our common belief binds us together as one regardless of location, culture, and backgrounds. We praise God for his love and for an opportunity such as this for our fellowship, worship, and witness. I'm also grateful to brother Nathan for facilitating this get-together for worship! Although we're all Baptists, our tradition or pattern of worship might differ a little bit, but I trust the Spirit of God will minister to each one of us this evening as we worship Him together.

This late-afternoon/evening, I feel prompted to share something that is very familiar to us but something so vital to our faith and action as Christians, and that is, **Love**. Love is not foreign to Christians. In fact, it has become a cliché for many Christians. We hear about it and talk about it very often, we use it all the time, but the authenticity of our love for God and our love for our neighbors stand in need of revisitation!

I would like to base my homily on one of our readings from 1 John 3:16-24 entitled, **"Living Out the Love of God!"**

The key theme of 1 John is 'the test of reality in the Christian life.' The letter has two main purposes: to encourage its readers to live in fellowship with God and his Son Jesus Christ, and to warn them against following false teaching that would destroy this fellowship. Therefore, they were encouraged not to love the things of the world (2:15-17). The premise of 1 John from which the text of our meditation is drawn is that, all who believe in Jesus Christ and love God must also love one another. The key word as well as the main focus of John's letters is 'love' found particularly in John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16ff. And the kind of love John emphasizes is not passive love but active

love. Another significant word used by John is 'light.' Those who love God and love others are in the light; otherwise, they're in the dark!

Because of the lengthy passage, I'll not be able to do justice to the text in expositing the same, but I'll try to dwell on the two dominant thoughts: 'loving God and loving each other' and thereby draw a couple of implications for us to apply in our lives and actions.

Love as the Foundation for Christian Living and Witness: Christian faith is based on Love – loving God and loving our neighbors. We're persuaded to love God because he first loved us, and our love for God demands our love for our neighbors. These two dimensional love sums up the characteristic of Christian faith. All forms of Christian activities without love amounts to nothing! But, love is not something that we discuss as an intellectual assent, but it's a verb! Unless it is acted out, it remains a mere word!

We're in post resurrection period right now. Jesus came so that, we will not only hear his love but experience it. He came in love, served in love, suffered in love, died in love for us sinners, and resurrected to give us the hope of eternal life out of love for those who would trust him and keep his commandments. And, his first commandment is that we love him with all our hearts, soul, and mind; and the second is to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). Neighbors are not only people who live next door to us but anyone or everyone within our reach.

Living Out the Love of God after Christ's own Likeness (vv.16ff.): This text begins with the concrete reality of love known and lived because of Jesus. In contrast to Cain who robbed his brother of life (3:12-15), Jesus laid down his own life for us. According to Brian Peterson, John is not interested in explaining just *how* Jesus' voluntary death benefits us. The point is that Jesus' act is the deepest meaning of "love", and so Jesus himself defines the character of the church's life.

John 10:11-18 tells us that, the good Shepherd gave his life for the sheep. . . . The ministry of Jesus for which he came to the world was not for himself but for others. He came to give his life a ransom for many which was motivated by love (Mark 10:45). The example Christ demonstrated was kenotic ministry – self-emptying in obedience to the Father for the sake of others. John seems to be saying that, our love for our Lord Jesus Christ demands that, we emulate his attitude and actions.

To love our neighbours as ourselves is an overwhelming commandment! It's overwhelming because it seems to demand that, "I tear the skin off my body and wrap it around another person so that I feel that I am that other person; and all the longings that I have for my own safety and health and success and happiness I now feel for that other person as though he/she were me" (John Piper).

It is an absolutely staggering commandment because the present generations seems to be caught up with the attitude of self-preserving, self-enhancing, self-exalting, self-esteeming, self-advancing as human beings.

It's extremely difficult to consider others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3) and to love others as our own selves. Jon Bloom suggests a possibility: he said, "The most loving thing we can do for others is love God more than we love them. For if we love God most, we will love others best." Bloom goes on to say that, those who have encountered the living Christ understand the depth of love and breadth of grace that flows out from them toward others when they themselves are filled with love for God and all he is for them and means to them in Jesus. And they know the comparatively shallow and narrow love they feel toward others when their affection for God is ebbing. There's a reason why Jesus said the second greatest commandment is like the first: if we love God with all our heart, we will love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). It functions like faith and works; if we truly have the first, the second naturally follows. But if God is not the love of our life, there is no way that we will *truly* love our neighbors as ourselves. For we will love ourselves supremely (*desiringGod.org*).

Application: Many Christians often misplace love in their lives. Faith has been often exalted as one single element that encompasses everything, but in Christianity, faith alone cannot stand. If there's such a thing as dead-faith as the writer of James tells us, then it is faith separated from love. The apostle Paul told the Christians at Corinth that "faith, hope, and love abide, but the greatest is love" (1 Cor.13:13).

Sometimes what we talk about the most are least experienced. For instance, today, peace is a buzz word globally. We appreciate Peace Committees at all levels; we congratulate them for their efforts. Yet, news of hatred and violence continue to be heard across the globe. One typical example right now is the situation in Myanmar since February 1, 2021, the military coup that has led to mass protest and the militaries' retaliation that has eliminated over 700 precious lives. It has not only affected the people of Myanmar but the whole world. There are multiple highly

esteemed organizations that can reach out to the hurting people in Myanmar, but love seems to be thin! They're more concerned about the protocols than the lives of the people! Perhaps, the world must be talking about love instead of peace. There can be no peace without love. The Scripture also tells us that love is greater than hope (1 Cor.13:13). The hope of/for peace must begin with love!

There's no religion in the world that has its foundation based on love. Islam is based on brotherhood; Hinduism is based on Self-emancipation through cycle of birth called *Samsara* earned by human good actions called *karma marga*; Buddhism is based on self-actualization called *Nirvana* by practicing four-fold truths and eight-fold paths. . .

It's only Christianity that is founded on the love of God. Therefore, we're to love him in return and love our neighbors who love him too and even people who might not know God, the Creator of heaven and earth! Love can change the world, and we all must play our parts according to our abilities and opportunities. We're ardently taught about the love of God and the reason to love God; however, to love God is to love one another is often overlooked and not taught enough!

Now, the pandemic caused by Covid-19 is a global crisis. Compared to other nations, Australia is doing very well in dealing with the crisis. In fact, Australia has prevented the virus from spreading and the second wave isn't affecting you much. Blessed are you! In India, right now, over 300,000 new positive cases and over 5000 deaths everyday! The situation is pathetic and overwhelming! Some churches are trying their best to show love not only to their members but to people of all castes, creeds, religions, and races! But churches and individual Christians can do much more. I keep wishing that, Christian leaders are counted as "Front-liners" while I do my best doing what I as an individual or my family can do.

Besides the pandemic, the world isn't becoming a better place to live in but the reverse is true! The more challenging life in this world becomes, the more opportunity for Christians like you and I to live out the love of God by loving our neighbors. John talks about *loving in deeds and in truth, not in words or in tongue*. Our specialty as Christians is *talking* about love, but *walking the talk* is what we all need to improve!

Obviously, I'm pretty much ignorant about *South Yarra Community Baptist Church*, but little did I hear about her sounds pretty good! The congregation is probably around 30-40 people with a reasonable spread of ages, ethnicities, sexualities, and

educational backgrounds. You are socially and theologically very open minded. . . You have also promised to provide a safe place for all groups of people including minority groups. Therefore, it is a community motivated by the love of God! A community is not only a group of people gathered together but a *fellowship* of people motivated by the love of God and love for one another! I also like the idea of Zoom breakout rooms for socializing in smaller groups after the worship service. We can surely love and care for each other better if we get to know each other better! I'm looking forward to that moment! And, as we learn to love each other by loving God, we need to shift from member care to witness – from church mindset to kingdom mindset, motivated by love. John reiterates the vitality of loving our neighbors in 1 John 4:12: “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” So, that the world will know that we're children of the living God!

I'm aware that, the celebration of the Lord's Table will follow. There are several names for the Lord's Table such as the *Holy Communion*, the *Lord's Supper*, the *Mass*, and the *Eucharist*. Of all the names, Eucharist is appropriate for us today, because it means “thanksgiving” for his sacrificial love! As we celebrate the *Eucharist*, let's remember the love of God manifested in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ. For which Jesus himself said, “**Do this in remembrance of me**” in remembrance of his love in action (1 Cor. 11:24).

Praise be to God for his love bestowed on all of us, so that we can also love each other like he does!