

God is love: 1 John ch.4



Today's TFTD comes from Revd Rod Hill:

I haven't had the opportunity, yet, to see it but one of the best-known works of Western art is that section of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel which depicts God reaching down to touch Adam's fingertip and give him life. Hold that thought for a moment, I will return to it.

Regardless of whether 1 John is written by the same person as the fourth gospel there are undoubtedly lots of echoes or references to the fourth gospel in this passage, chapter 4, and the various references to love in this chapter are perhaps the strongest resonances. You might like to look up the parallels for yourself.

In this section of the epistle, the writer says, *“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world”* (v. 9). Michelangelo's painting has power not just because of its artistic merits, but because, I am told, one can virtually feel the life that flows from God's hand to Adam. Even so, John writes not just that *God showed his love among us* but that he did so by sending the Son into the world *that we might live through him*.

As many of you will know, through Advent I have been pondering the significance of what I was reading about the Northumbrian Celtic approach to Christmas. If I've read it correctly these writers take the view that it isn't so much Easter and Resurrection that shows the love of God and God's ultimate intervention in the world, but Christmas – Incarnation. Is that perhaps something of what this letter is getting at?

As the writer develops this theme of God's life-giving love, he makes three important points:

- God is the *source* of all love (4:7-8);
- God *models* what genuine love is (4:9-10); and
- God *commands* us to love each other (4:11-12).

We move from the assertion that *God is love* to the command that we are to love each other. Indeed, the whole point of the passage is to trace the relationship between God's love and human love, and to show how human love flows from God's own love. The

Source of Love (4:7-8)

Because God is love, *love comes from God*. God is the source of love. Love comes from God to us, then flows through us to others in the community. When the writer exhorts his readers, “*let us love one another*”, he is encouraging them to allow God's love to flow through them. For because *God is love*, love must characterize those who claim to be *born of God* or to *know God* (v. 7; 3:10, 14; 4:20-21). Those who claim to be doing the will of God and reflecting God's activity in the world will be known by the love they manifest for God and for each other. This was what Jesus told his disciples (Jn 13:35).

Many of us have been utterly dismayed by what we have seen in the United States over the past ten days or so, incredible scenes of carnage in the Capitol Building because of the whipping up of, amongst other things, hatred – the absolute opposite of love. For me, one of the most vengeful outworkings of this hatred that we have seen developing for a while now has been the number of federal executions in the last few months, and especially yesterday. How on earth does that show love?

Friends and colleagues across the United States and many American friends in Britain are as utterly appalled by the lack of love and grace shown by the American President as I am. I sometimes wonder, though, just how far removed from that we are in Britain, or in Brazil or other countries around the world where right wing populist leaders have risen to power in the past few years; leadership that often rides on the backs of a whipped-up fear of those who are ‘different from us’, as if ‘we’ are all the same.

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Dear Friends, let us love one another, here and around the world.

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