

John 15:9-17

May 5, 2024

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God personified. Amen.

A few weeks ago, we had Good Shepherd Sunday. I think today could be called Love Sunday. There is a lot of love in the lessons. The Johns are really into it.

We know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments (1 John 5:2). As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love (John 15:9).

Love is important and I think we intuitively know what love is, right? But, what do you think the opposite of love is?

Hate is probably the most used word, but I don't know if it is the most helpful word.

So, I decided to find out what thesaurus.com had to say, and it listed the following. And after I tell you what they are, let's take a vote on which one you think is the best word. They are: Animosity. Dislike. Enmity. Hate. Ill will. Indifference. Neglect. Apathy. Disloyalty. Sorrow. Treachery. Unhappiness.

What do you think?

OK. Now let me throw something else into the mix. Biblically speaking, love is an action, not a feeling, but an action. Love is active. It's doing things.

The incarnation is love. Jesus' healing and feeding people is love. Jesus' death and resurrection is love. The Holy Spirit is love. It's all active.

So, with that in mind, has your idea of a good word for the antithesis of love changed?

I'm inclined to go with the word indifference.

With indifference, there is a total lack of care, either good or bad. Indifference causes nothing to happen. And love, love is active. Whereas indifference is totally passive. It's a total "I don't care about you at all." Indifference. It actually kind of makes me sad. With indifference, it's as if you don't exist at all, which may be better than receiving hostility, I guess, but it still has a total lack of action.

Can you imagine if God never acted? There would be nothing. Well, not intentionally anyway.

But, God is love and love is active. So, for me, I think indifference is a really good antonym for love. Indifference has no action.

And God asks us to act. To abide in God's love and act. To keep the commandment to love others as we are loved by God by producing good fruit in the world. To produce good fruit for the sake of others is active.

And here again we have the image of good fruit, fruit that is actively made, that gets its energy from the sun/son, and grows. Fruit is packed with potential energy, sugar molecules, that when eaten make more action possible.

Love is active and causes action to happen.

In the first chapter of John, John connects us to the first chapter of Genesis.

**1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

Notice all the activity and energy in this section. The Word, who is Jesus, created everything. Active. He created life, which is active. He created light, which is energy, which causes action, and his light actively chases darkness away.

Creation is love. It is God's activity. It is not passive or indifferent, but active and with purpose. God creates life, light, the world, all the creatures, fruit trees, and human beings. It's all very active, and up until sin hit the world things were good, very good. God was walking around the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve and everyone was happily living together. Well, almost everyone.

In Genesis chapter 3, we get the big fruit fiasco.

Adam and Eve were only to eat the fruit off of the regular fruit trees and enjoy their life. God specifically told Adam, see that tree over there, don't eat it or you will die.

Then the serpent, who had heard rumors about the Tree of Knowledge, decided to find out if it were true or not. Would the people really die if they ate its fruit? Would their activity come to an end?

If you think about it, this was pretty smart on the part of the serpent. With the people out of the Garden, the rest of creation, or specifically the serpent, could take over the Garden. Adam was told to subdue them. Without him and his wife, the rest of creation would be free to do whatever they want. Party!

But, the serpent wasn't as smart as he thought he was, because by trying to get rid of the people from the Garden, he ended up punished.

Rabbis have said that the serpent, prior to this encounter, had walked around on legs. When he got busted, his punishment was to slither around in the dirt and get dust up his nose, dust from which Adam and Eve were made.

The serpent would never forget what he had done as long as he lived, and that carried on with his descendants as well. But, he was allowed to remain active, just as Adam and Eve were as well.

The real problem with the Tree of Knowledge is that it wasn't meant for activity like the other trees. The other trees gave energy, which turned into activity, and love is active. With love you love.

But knowledge is not active. Knowing is not active. Knowing life and death actually leads to indifference. It strips us of the energy to love others, because knowledge makes us believe that some deserve life and others deserve death. That is a very dangerous game, a game that is not meant for people to play. People were to be active in love, not indifferent in knowledge.

And so, Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden of Eden where they had walked side by side with God and were active in mutual love with God. With their removal from God's presence, we see that the fruit produced by eating from the Tree of Knowledge were shame, guilt, anxiety, enemies, and death. Not love.

And within the Garden of Eden there was another tree, the Tree of Life.

Prior to eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Eve had free access to it, but once they knew life and death, they had to be separated from it, because it is not up to people to decide who is worthy of life.

Access to that tree would only lead to all sorts of evil. That tree is meant for all of creation and no one was to have charge over it but God alone who is acting in love for creation. So, barring people from the Tree of Life was actually an act of love for the rest of creation.

But the story doesn't end there, humans were not eternally banned from that Tree of Life. It was given to all of humanity about three thousand years later. And we know that tree. It is the cross.

The cross is the Tree of Life and it was given to us even before we came to realize that we need a Savior. We need to be saved from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, because it has led to destruction instead of life.

God saw us floundering in shame, guilt, death, and anxiety, making enemies of one another, not being able to follow God's commands on our own, so God acted and showed us mercy, lovingly giving us the Tree of Life, which would cause good fruit to grow in the world. Good fruit that can overtake the bad fruit produced by the Tree of Knowledge.

On the cross, Christ transforms the fruit of death into the fruit of life.

Shame is overtaken by mercy. Guilt by forgiveness. Anxiety by peace. Enemies by friends. Death by life. Indifference by love.

Christ's blood is the good fruit that has been given to us. It is the fruit we eat in Holy Communion, so that that good fruit can be produced in us and we can produce that good fruit in the world. The fruit of mercy, forgiveness, peace, friendship, and life in the world for the sake of the world.

God is love and love is active in the world through us.

Love is not passive and it is not indifferent. It is purposeful and independent of all human judgment. It destroys the Tree of Knowledge with the Tree of Life. It destroys all barriers and gives life to all people, no matter who they are or what we may think of them, good or bad.

It doesn't matter. To God, it doesn't matter, because God is the Father of all of Creation and loves all of Creation.

Our friend, Jesus, asks us to go and love others as we are loved, not passively and not by ourselves, but with his Holy Spirit that enables us to love and be life bearers in the world, bearing the good fruit of the Tree of Life – mercy, forgiveness, peace, friendship, and unconditional love. That is the fruit that lasts all eternity, because it is eternally produced by God.

God is love and God is active in the world through you and me so that faith in Christ can conquer the world, destroying shame, guilt, anxiety, and enmity, all the things that put Jesus on the cross.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!! Thanks be to God. Amen.