

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation this morning is the Epistle lesson of the first letter of St. John the third chapter verses sixteen through twenty-four.

Introduction: There is a catchy acrostic explanation for the word *joy*. *J* stands for Jesus; *o* stands for others; and *y* stands for yourself. Some say that this is a fine way to prioritize our love: Jesus, others, and yourself. But there must be an awareness that God has loved you unconditionally to make it possible to feel truly loved. Our love for Jesus stems from the love God has shown us in him. We express our love for Jesus by following his “new commandment” that we love one another. (This acrostic could be used as a children’s message or put on cards for use in the sermon.)

1. We are Loved

- A. A Poor Self-Image

Psychologists tell us that one of the major problems in our society is that people do not like themselves. However, if you ask someone how they are doing, what will they say? More than likely, they will tell you that they are fine or ok. This is a case of words not agreeing with actions. We hate ourselves and so we tried to find love in a myriad of other places. We often see how people express the absence of love in their lives through self-destructive lifestyles: indulging in drugs, alcohol, immorality, pornography, self-harm, and abortion. We do not love ourselves so we fall into the dangerous trap of thinking that others do not love us as well,

- B. A Positive Self-Image

Yet, nothing could be farther from the truth. Someone does love you. That Someone is God. How much does God love you? God loves you so much that the Father sent the Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer, bleed, die, and rise from the dead for you. He loves you so much that He sends you the Holy Spirit to create and sustain faith in you. That through the blessed waters of Holy Baptism, He makes you His dear beloved Child. If God

loves me and declares me forgiven, then my conscience can be set at peace, and I can have confidence before God (vv 20–21). He is greater and knows our hearts better than ourselves. If I consider myself unloved and unlovable, then I am rejecting God’s unconditional love and the truth of the gospel.

2. Love for Jesus

A. Our Love Is Not Just Words

There is an old adage, “Actions speak louder than words.” John counsels us to not let our love degenerate into mere verbiage produced by a fast-moving tongue and pious mouth. That is known as hypocrisy. Jesus got upset with the scribes and Pharisees for giving an outward appearance of religiosity while inside they were corrupt (Matt 23:27–28). Our love is not just mere words, but it shows itself in thoughts, deeds and actions. It does no good if we see someone in need, feel for them, and do nothing about them but merely say be warm and well. No, we feel for them and we help them as best as we can. This is nothing because of ourselves. Rather, it flows from what God has done for us.

B. It Is a Responsive Love

“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). God demonstrated his love, not merely through words, but through action. Jesus had a life of active love, performing miracles, teaching, and doing good. His suffering and death proved without a doubt the sincerity and depth of his love, as He hangs there, bleeding, and dying on your behalf while you were still enemies of God. Jesus’ resurrection was the Father’s stamp of approval. We are moved to respond by showing our love through our actions. We follow the great command given on Maundy Thursday, “Love one another as I have loved you.” This love does not love others expecting a good response, or to get something out of loving another person, we love regardless of what the response might be.

3. Love for Others

B. Proper Motives

Jesus tells us to love others to demonstrate our love for him: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt 25:40). Our active love keeps us active. It shows itself in simple ways. We always have at least one opportunity to show our love to others. We can bake a pie for a new neighbor, rake the leaves or shovel the walk for an elderly shut-in, pray for someone in need, support and encourage people as they battle their sinful nature, reminding them of the love of God shown in the death and resurrection of Jesus, visit the sick and dying, serve on one of the boards at church, teach Sunday school or a Bible class, invite a friend or relative to attend church, or listen compassionately to one who is distressed.

Conclusion: Recall when, after his suffering, death, and resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to the disciples and asked Peter three times if he loved him (John 21:119). Our Lord does not tell Peter three times that he loves him, because he has already proven his love by allowing himself to be crucified for the sins of all. There is no question that Jesus loves us. Rather, the question Jesus asked Peter is the same one he asks us today: “do you love me?” (John 21:17).

We do love Jesus. We have been baptized in his name for the forgiveness of sins. We have received his Spirit and are filled with faith. We gather every Sunday to hear his Word, remember him by receiving his body and blood in the sacrament, and praise him. We are now demonstrating our love for him by our actions. May God move us to continue doing so every day of the week.

The Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.