

Today I'll focus on three points from the reading:

1. Real love comes from God, because God is love.
2. God's love is shown most clearly in the gift of his son to die for us.
3. Our love for one another is wholly dependent of God's love for us.

Okay, let's start with the first point:

Real love comes from God, because God is love.

This is how our reading begins: **Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

The first word: **Beloved:** Loved by God, but also loved by John.

Right through this letter is the understanding

That God's love for us and our love for each other belong together.

In fact, our reading starts with an exhortation for us

To **love one another.**

The love that St John is talking about

Is not the love that we have for our country or spouse or ice cream

But the sort of love that looks out for the good of the other

And is willing to suffer in order help those in need,

Even when they can't do us any good in return.

More than this: God is good, and helps those who don't *deserve* help

As Jesus says, God makes the sun rise on the evil and the good,

He gives rain to the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:43-48)

This willingness to help others, regardless of their deserving help,

And regardless of their ability to pay us back,

This is the mature sort of love that St John is talking about

That love that we should show one another.

This brings us to the second point:

God's love is shown most of all in the gift of his son to die for us

Listen to what our reading says: **God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.**

If we want a clear picture in our minds of what mature love looks like,
Of what perfect love looks like,
Then the message of the Gospel, of God sending his Son
To pay be the atoning sacrifice for our sins
This gives us good material for our meditation.
Not only did our Father gave his Son
To pay the debt that we can't pay,
To clean the mess that we can't clean,
To give us his peace in exchange for our sin,
He did all this when we were hostile to him.

There is something very practical about this teaching,
Something that can give us an experience of the real God.
Listen to what God's word says: **Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.**

OK: we can't see God: there's nothing surprising about this statement,
But we can see what receiving God's love in Christ looks like:
It looks like us loving each other.

In fact, St John says God's love is *perfected*
That it reaches it's goal like an acorn reaches its goal
In growing into an oak,
That it reaches its goal as we love one another.

More than this, as we love one another,
As we are kind and generous and considerate of each other
We are confirmed in our own life of faith.

This is what St John writes: **By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.**

One way to think about what St John is saying is this:

Just as our faith grows as we confess it with our lips,
So our faith grows as we show love for each other.

Do you want to be confirmed, strengthened, in your own life of faith?
Then be kind, and considerate, and generous

To your brothers and sisters, and see how God brings you to your goal
As a human being, as his child.

More than this, as we love one another

We move from being afraid of God to being joyful in his presence.

This is what St John writes: **God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.**

Now in the Old Testament we read words like this: **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.**

That's from Proverbs 9.10

And we read this: **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practise it* have a good understanding.**

That's from Psalm 111.10:

But our reading says perfect love *casts out fear*, so what's going on?

Well, think about it this way:

Let's say a young person gets a job in retail,

And they're tempted to take money from the till,

But they don't because they're afraid of what will happen

If they're caught: that they'll be shamed, and fired,

And maybe even charged.

And, if they think about it,

That God will judge them for what they have done.

If the only reason they don't steal is because they're afraid,

Well, *that's a good start* – it's better than the folly of stealing.

Of course, we want young people to mature in their handling of money,

We want them to mature, to see how respect other people's property

Builds trust, and builds up the human community,

We want them to become trustworthy and responsible

So they no longer refrain from stealing because of fear,

But rather they care for other people's property *out of love*.

The fear of the Lord is indeed the beginning of wisdom,

But perfect love, mature love, love that reaches its goal

Drives out fear, and gives us joy in life.

This brings us to our third and final point:

Our love for one another is entirely dependent of God's love for us.

This is what St John writes: **We love because he first loved us.**

It's God who has taken the initiative

It is God who shows us what real love looks like,

And it is only in response to this love that we can live

As children of God who show love for each other.

St John draws a very practical conclusion from this teaching.

This is what he writes: **Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.**

Of course, we remember that Jesus gave us a command

On the night he was betrayed,

He gave us the command so that we might love one another:

'Take and eat... Drink of it all of you...'

This command brings us together as children of God,

And as brothers and sisters of the one Father we eat and drink

The body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins:

We receive the love of God as we share in the benefits

Of the atonement won for us by Jesus

And God grows us in the life of love.

So, let's admit our immaturity in love,

Trust in the mercy of God in Christ,

Show the generosity, care, and consideration that we see in God,

And be confirmed in the life of faith

As the Father's name is glorified in our love for each other.

In Jesus' name. Amen.