

We are thankful for your loving kindness. We are thankful for your grace that you bestow upon us. We are thankful for the gift of salvation. And we pray that not only those in this sanctuary but whomever may hear this word or whoever may speak to throughout the course of the week will repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, be filled with your Holy Spirit and be transformed into the individual, the man, the woman, the disciple that you know we can be. Lord in Jesus name we pray that you would command this service, our worship, our psalm, our prayer, and our time in the word. We love you. We hope we tell you that enough. Amen. Our opening scripture this morning is Psalm 63. Oh God you are my God. I earnestly search for you, my soul thirsts for you, my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory. Your unfailing love is better than life itself. How I praise you. I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy. I lie awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night. Because you are my helper, I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you. Your strong right hand holds me securely. But those plotting to destroy me will come to ruin. They will go down into the depths of the earth. They will die by the sword and become the food of jackals. But the king will rejoice in God. All who swear to tell the truth will praise him while liars will be silenced. Here we are back at last week for last week's sermon. So I hope you're all ready for that. I've been ready for it because again as we have learned time and again through John that the words that we read and the deep meanings behind them sometimes we don't join together. The words are beautiful. You've heard me reference many times 1st Corinthians 13. I read it. I referenced it again in the Church Town Weekly because love has been on my mind. And those words are of course incredibly beautiful. But the depth and the richness of them, let alone the impossibility of accomplishing that without the power of God, is the meaning of those words. It's the power behind those words. I could read my love, love poetry like that all day long, but without love behind it, without the power of God behind it, I have no chance of fulfilling what's in that poem. And so this is what we've been talking about as we've come across these sayings of John, these passages in John that we sort of take for granted. And this may be another one of those cases where we don't grasp the deep and powerful meaning behind this passage, behind this teaching. So let's go to 1st John chapter 4 beginning with verse 7. "Dear friends, let us continue to love one another for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love." There is the first stop that I would like to make. Because we can really enjoy something, you could even say that you love something, but that is not what is being spoken of here. The foundational principle behind this statement is, "For God is love." Everything that John has taught and is teaching is founded on this principle, this power, this definition of love. So when I'm going to use the word love in my life, we should be thinking about John's foundational definition of love when we use it. When we use the word love shallowly or glibly, we should be able to recognize that. "Oh, I love a good hot fudge sundae." I'm not going to say, "No, don't say that, heretic." That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that as Christians and disciples, we can discern the difference of, "I love you, Kelly, and my life is yours, and I love a good hot fudge sundae." So we should be able to tell the difference. And that's all that John is saying here. The foundational principle of love between disciples of Christ is God binding us together by the power of his Holy Spirit. And since God is love, we are bound together by love. You were supposed to all say love. So since God is love, we are all bound together by love. And it's not like, "Oh, lovey-dovey, honey, honey." It's got the love, selfless, sacrificial, giving love of God. "What do you need, brother? What do you need, sister? Can I pray with you? Can I be with you? What's going on?" Whatever. Those sorts of things. "Do you have a minute? Do you have a minute?" "Yes, I do. For you, I do, for sure." "Because I love you with the love of Christ." That's where John is with this. And so the first principle today is discerning the difference between a hot fudge sundae and God's love. All right? So you can keep that in your mind. Because he's not going to use these words outside of that context. He's not going to go the hot fudge sundae route. He's going the God is love. As a disciple of Christ, understand this

defining attribute of God. Moving on. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. Sacrificial love of God. This is real love. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sin. It's the same side of the equation. Let me read that again. This is real love. Not that we love God. We didn't love him into existence. We didn't love him and then he said, "Wow, these people love me. I think I'll change and be nice." Or something like that. God is love. It's his definition. And we love him because he loved us first. You've heard that and you will hear that. We love him because we know him. We know our scriptures, old and new. We know the attributes of God. We know his nature and his unchanging nature. We have everything that we need, information wise, to make that decision. To accept the Lord Jesus as the Christ of God and Savior of all humanity or reject him. When we are, and to bring this down to an earthly level, when we are, does anybody even say courting anymore? When you're courting or dating or getting to know somebody, this is the information that you're gathering. And with this, backwards as it often is in our culture, the way it should be is that we should court or date and gather this information and then we can make that determination. This is the One. This is not the One. So we have examples, obviously, mirrors in our lives, our daily lives, of the overwhelming foundational principles that show us who God is and how he interacts with us. This is real love, not that we love him, but that he loved us. Our love will not transform him, will not change him. His love will transform us. It will change us. And you say, "Well, of course, that's a foundational principle of my faith." That is really out of whack in Christendom today, as we try again, as we always have, creating God in our image, creating him into an image or a person or a personality that we can love. Okay? But that's not how the equation works. Our love does not transform him or change him. His love, however, as we see in the sacrificial form of Jesus Christ, the salvation of all humankind, transforms us. So that's another principle that I'd like you to walk home with. It doesn't go both ways. Alright? We've talked about this a little bit with new song singers, the songs that we sang, "And I Will Bless You," right? Our blessing of the Lord is being content in the Lord, having faith in who he is. He is blessed by us when we say, "Yes, Lord. Thank you. I love you." It's not edifying him or strengthening him when we often think of blessings coming from the Lord, edifying us and strengthening us or even physical things that we have, but us, we blessing the Lord, is accepting his love and being humbled by his grace and him saying, "Welcome, child. Welcome to the family." So, moving on to verse 11. "Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is brought to full expression in us. And God has given us his spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us." Stop there, because again, we see this and you should be saying, "Yeah, okay. I understand this. We surely ought to love one another." Do we understand the overwhelming, all-encompassing power of that statement? He is speaking to the gathered. He's speaking to the church, to be sure. That's hard enough, because we're all diverse personalities and people and some people click together and other people don't click together. Having a church that is bound together by God's Holy Spirit, should say in congregation, that's difficult enough for humans to set aside differences and allow love to cover those differences and accept one another as brothers and sisters. But if we are to be light into the darkness, this takes on a whole new meaning in terms of who we love and how we love and how we demonstrate that love. Let's just begin with something perhaps even more simple yet complex. A fellow Christian, brother or sister, who has hurt you deeply. Personally, you don't have any reason to doubt their salvation. That's not our job anyway. But how do you handle loving that individual? We are called to love that individual within the gathering of the saints, perhaps not the same congregation, but in the family of God. That's difficult enough. You see where the layers of depth which this really profoundly affects us. We can say, and we have great relationships with a lot of people in here, it's easy for me to say, "I love you brother, I love you sister." It's that the hugs and Sunday mornings are fantastic and the conversation and the laughter and all the different things. But even within God's kingdom, those individuals who have hurt us, how do we demonstrate love? Does it simply mean that we forget? No, you're not going to forget. Does it mean that we forgive? Yes, we're commanded to forgive. What does

that look like? Does that look like reconciliation? Not always. Remember, forgiveness is a one-way street. It can be a two-way street and that's wonderful. Ryan and I, we have a beef, we have a problem, there's a little issue, we come together, we work it out. I say, "You know, I love you brother, please forgive me." He says, "My behavior, please forgive me." And we forgive each other, we hug it out, and we go get a burger. That's wonderful, especially the burger part. You know what I'm saying though? That's great. But those profoundly deep wounds, the way that we wound God when we sin against our holy God, He sent His Son sacrificially for us. And we have nothing to forgive Him for, yet He in His grace, He extends that grace and forgives us. So yes, we forgive. And what does that look like very practically? It may look simply like praying for an individual. This has really helped me grow spiritually because I was always one of those egotistical individuals who thought that they knew a lot and had to argue a lot and had to get the last word in a lot and had to see something, a wrong that needed to be righted, or somebody who said something that I had to say something about, and all of this other stuff, which was just demonstrations of my own ego, trying to be right, trying to get the last word, those sorts of things, and especially with people that were antagonistic toward me. How do you handle that? Can you stay growing in the Spirit if you're constantly engaged in earthly antagonisms? I don't think so. But what has helped me to grow is to simply love and pray. I don't have to say anything. God's got that individual. Now there are times, we always have that caveat, right? As Christians, you may feel that it may be the time. Eve's going to give you the words and we're going to do it. But most of the time, love covers that antagonism. And I pray for that individual's eyes to be open, their heart to be softened, that they return and repent and come to the Lord, knowing that if they see that in me, perhaps, perhaps they will, perhaps they may have another question about it. Does that make sense? So we talk about love covering that and sacrificially covering that, but it is not the sort of, "Look, I'm a Christian, my feet float two inches off the ground at all times, I am holy, you are not, and I will show you all of these things." No. It is me being Brian Warner, the way God made me and that thus transformed me, living my life and demonstrating the love of God through my speech and my actions. And that's where, again, I said my actions have changed a lot. I don't have to fight with everybody, especially when you come into faith, right? And you're feeling calling on your life and you're like, "On fire for the Lord!" And you're right and everybody else is wrong. And you've got to tell them they're wrong because you need to save their souls. It's a real thing. And the first two years you walk around here, you want to pray with everybody and argue with everybody? No, God's got this. His hand is guiding history, His hand is guiding the church, and we are all but instruments in that. We pray, we take it to the Lord, we take them to the Lord, and we see the demonstration of real love in that God gave His only Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. With that demonstration of sacrificial love, we surely ought to demonstrate that to one another. Inside the church when it's easy, inside the church when it may be more difficult, and as we leave the church and walk in the truth of what we know and walk in the truth of who God is. Furthermore, we have seen within our own eyes, this is verse 14, "Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent His Son to be Savior of the world." It's part of being a Christian. You can't deny Christ if you want to be a Christian. It's kind of in the name. And although again we see lots of folks who will deny Christ, we talked about that before, yet still want to claim the name of Christ because the name of Christ is power. How wonderful is His name. It doesn't work that way. Knowing that Christ is Savior and the Lord of my life, professing Him as such personally and professing Him publicly is what we are called to do. If we want to claim the name of Christ, then we should be under the blood of Christ and we should recognize that Jesus is Savior. He is God. We talked about that. John talked about that. Here's how we know. They don't claim that Jesus Christ is God. "All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them and they live in God. We know how much God loves us and we have put our trust in His love. God is love and all who live in love live in God and God lives in them." Now if you know John's writing, you know this is John's writing. If you know John chapter 17 in particular, John 15 comes to mind. He's constantly reinforcing the relational, spiritually relational aspect of who we are in Christ and who Christ is in us. In that union of God and man that is made possible only through salvation. And John wants

everybody to know that this thus becomes the foundation of who you are. It's not who you were, but it is the power of God's Holy Spirit transforming you and making you who you are now. There's a difference. Trusting in that is what we have a lot of problems with and we've been talking about that now for weeks. Faith. Faith. It's not, it's not, I'm not changing the way I thought that I would change. Change isn't happening fast enough in my life. Still I have these problems or issues. I, fill in the blank, because we all have lives. Do you still also have faith in God that God's strong right arm is not only guiding all of history, but guiding your life? And things are going sideways and everything seems up in the air and the world seems to be falling apart. You personally, relationships, jobs, all the different diseases, things that go, we go through in our lives and we're called to put our trust in God. We're called to put our trust in His love. Verse 16. We know how much God loves us. He demonstrated that through Jesus Christ and we have put our trust in His love. God is love and all who live in love, God, live in God. God lives in them and as we live in God our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face Him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. This is important. If you're a note taker or a highlighter, highlight this because this, we talked about the foundational principle that John is always speaking, God is love. It's not that God looks down and says, "Oh Kelly, you're worthy of my love. I'll love you. Josh, no, not so much." Yeah, we talked earlier, right? There's two Josh's there. So they don't know. I never realized that. But that's not it. He is love. When we talk about unconditional, we even think like, "Well, I absolutely have unconditional love for my children," for example, but that doesn't even compare to the unconditional love of God. You don't have to do anything for Him to love. You have been created as this special creation unique among all of creation and He loves you. All of the craziness that you see in the media streams today, guess what? He loves those people and His heart breaks for their repentance so that His love may transform them into the men and women that they were born to be. We must remember that and that is another example of what can we do to affect change. This makes me angry and trying this on the children. This is a prayer. Pray and pray and pray. Act when God asks you or tells you to act. Speak if He asks you or tells you to speak. But what you can do constantly and regularly and without fail is pray. Is pray. And it will serve them as... let me reverse that equation. That prayer, that recognition of God's love, that faith in God's love will serve you as much as it hopefully serves them and it will bring that peace among all the turbulent. God's love is powerful because God is love. Verse 17, let me touch upon that before we move forward in your career. As we live in God, our love grows more perfect. Now this word, perfect, you all have heard the passage of Scripture, "Be perfect as I am perfect." It's a very difficult, very difficult translation that is much more wisely translated as complete. You know how seven is the number of completeness, of perfection, right? Seven days created. The word is very difficult. It means be complete, as complete as you can be as a human being, as you possess God's Holy Spirit within you. So it's not perfect, like in the sense of every math equation, boom, nailed it, perfect. Or being perfect as a Christian, which can be really misunderstood and then you are one of those jerky Christians who thinks you're perfect. And we don't like them, you know, that's annoying. Those are the people that we have to pray because they're very hard to love within the church. But it's complete, it's whole as a human being. Let God's love make you as complete, as whole, as perfect as you can be as a human being on this planet today. That's what we're talking about there. So God's love and that faith in God's love grows more perfect, more complete, and this is important so that we will not be afraid on the day of judgment. But we can face Him with confidence because we live like Jesus in this world. You realize how important and profound that passage is. We talk about Jesus Christ living, being crucified, dead and buried, being raised bodily from the dead, breaking sin and the power of sin in our lives, and breaking death, overcoming death and the power of death in our lives. What is the power of death in our lives? The fear of dying. And if we constantly walk around in fear, and we're going to read a little bit about that, we're not going to be living in grace. We're not going to be living sacrificially for others because I'm too concerned about my own life and what I can do to preserve and hang on. Now again, don't get that twisted that, "Oh, I'm sick so I'll never go to the doctor," that sort of thing. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the power of that fear that

consumes a great majority of human beings. Because we are self-aware, and we do want the things, and we do want the life, and we become very afraid. For the Christian, it should be the opposite. Not that we want this to happen, but we should not fear it happening. Why? Because we do not fear the judgment seat of God. All people should, and part of our message actually in repentance is you should fear the judgment seat of God. The Christian, the true Christian, the follower of Jesus, living sacrificially, trusting in God, the power of God, living under the blood of Jesus Christ, does not have that fear. Thus, the power of death, the fear of death, is broken and we are free to live. Live as God calls us to live, not holding back and reserving out of fear, but living as we are called to live because we are not afraid of that judgment. We're not afraid when He said, you know, and we and we all desire to hear those words, right? Your race is over. Your race is won. Well done, my servant. We want those words and there's no harm in wanting and desiring that because that could be a very pure motivation to go into the word "know God," open yourself to God, and want that from Him. You want His approval. You want His guidance. You want His relationship. You want...those are things that are good to want. Those are things that are good to desire. Like, I can desire to have a wonderful relationship with my Creator. Oh, that's horrible. No, that's good. How do you go about doing that? That's why we're here. So that's important. You see how John's leading us to that point, instilling in us the power of God, the love of God. God is love. Our faith in that love, which translates to our salvation, the power of God within us, and all of that leads to us living life and living life to the full because we are not afraid of that judgment seat. We're not. If you are, we can talk. You can talk to Christian brothers and sisters. You're like, "I'm not there." That's why we're here. That's why we're gathered as believers to help one another. I certainly was not there long ago. Such love has no fear. I've already referenced this, so this should slide into the equation quite well. I've already referenced fear. Such love has no fear because complete, perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced His perfect love. If you're a Christian today and you're wandering around going, "I still fear God's punishment," again, let's grow together. Let's talk. Let's go back into the Word. Let's go back into prayer because a follower of Jesus Christ who is living by the power of God's love sacrificially for Him, for others, should not have that fear. But yet, I'm still afraid of dying, and I'm afraid I might get punishment. Love of God, let's open our hearts. Let's open our minds. Let's submit ourselves in prayer. Submit ourselves as a living sacrifice. Let's cast out that fear because God is not a God who desires to punish. God is a God who desires to save you from punishment. There's a difference. Big difference. So these are indicators, just as I had indicated in some of John's writing before, these are points of discernment. How do we know if one is of God? He proclaims Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Fully God, fully man. The points of discernment. Are you professing to be a Christian today and living in fear of God's punishment? You say, "Well, pastor, I know I read in the Bible somewhere that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of understanding. So what's this? Am I supposed to fear the Lord or not fear the Lord? Well, here's where we go into the complete Word of God. The fear of the Lord, the healthy respect for sovereign, all-powerful, omnipotent, omniscient God should motivate us to these ends. It's not that God is walking around and stalking around wanting to punish, as I said. But he is creator and master of the universe. If you are not in awe and reverence and recognition of that, you're going to go nowhere fast in your faith. You might as well put your faith in that piano or whatever. Same difference. So there is a difference. Just like that word "perfect," that word "fear," look at its context. Fear of punishment from a God who is hateful and wants to hurt me, or the fear and reverence in all of a holy God, creator, sustainer of the universe. And I know that you all are card-carrying Bible geeks and you are able to make that discernment. If you're not card-carrying today, make sure you pick up your card on the way out. Because you're all smart enough and I know you know that difference. And you have to read those differences and understand those nuances, especially when you get into conversations with non-believers. Well, that's a legitimate question. I'm not supposed to have fear of God, but yet right over here it says, "Fear of the Lord is the beginning." How do you explain that? I bet you all can. Not just because I just said it either. I bet you all could have before I said it. Well, let me show you these

passages. Let me show you the context of this word and what God is saying. There is a difference. "If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced His perfect and complete love. We love each other because He loved us first." Goes back to what I said earlier. Our love does not transform Him or make Him who He is. His love transforms us. If someone says, "I love God," but demonstrates hate or shows hate to a fellow believer, that person is a liar. For if we don't love people we can see. How can we love God whom we cannot see? Another point of discernment. I love God. God is love. The love of God is within me and He told me to hate you. Doesn't work. There's a complete disconnect there. And I know that I'm speaking into real lives with real trauma and real situations that you have endured at the hands of other people, perhaps other believers. I know. I have a life as well. And this stuff is not just, "Oh, that's easy." No. This is the stuff that you, perhaps those closest to you, or perhaps just you and the Lord sit and pray and talk and work out together. Because you're not Jesus. You don't have that divine nature. I still have a nature that would like to just be quiet. Those silly jokes about, "I want to have Jesus and be able to punch people in the throat." Yeah, that's the thing. You still feel those things. You can work through them by the power of God. So if someone says, "I love God but hates a fellow believer," the person's a liar. Point of discernment. A point of discernment. Those two can't go together. You better check yourself. Right? Get in front of that mirror if that's the case. For if we don't love people we can see, simple logic, how can we love God whom we cannot see? And he has given us this command, "Those who love God must also love their fellow believers." Now we understand this to be true as we talk about often the epistles are written. Some are written to individuals, the pastoral epistles, but for the most part they are written into the body of Christ so that we may learn about our relationship with God through Jesus Christ and how it translates into a body of believers. How should we behave toward one another? What are the ordinances that we have been commanded to follow so that we may remember how are we to behave with individuals outside the kingdom of God? There's a lot of instruction after Jesus's ascension in how those who are filled with his Holy Spirit are to behave and this is one of those examples. There are a lot of good questions that I've raised here this morning. A lot of good what we have called points of discernment, if you will, that are applicable not only to the church, local, the church universal, but they are applicable to you as an individual. So go back through this text. All of the questions or all of the points of discernment that John brings up, stop, think, and pray. Where are you as a child of God? Where are you in understanding the complete love of God? Where are you in your faith regarding the love of God? We've been talking about that for a long time. Is your faith in him enough? For all this teaching of John, it's fantastic, but I need more. I need tangible results, so I'll believe. Where are you with that? Where are you in the love and forgiveness within the body? Where are you with love for those who may be outside of the body but very close to you? All of these things are fantastic questions that can spur a lot of growth. And John and all the epistles written into the church, that's the biggest point of them all, to learn and to grow and to become the individuals, the families, the church that he sees, not that we want but that he sees. So there's that. Any questions, comments, or concerns regarding the sermon, the teaching from John 4, 1 John 4? Challenging. We read that and we're like, "That's beautiful, that's Christian, that's so fantastic." Man, it's deep, it's powerful, and it is meant to spur growth from the inside out. And I hope that I brought that forward today. And you do take that, stop at each one of those points, and look in the mirror, and I hope that you grow. I'm not staying here, me you. I've been living these scriptures and I hope that I grow in my own faith, in my own trust. trust.