

#1775

Cf. #272 #476 #1067 #1304

1 John 3:16-24<sup>1</sup>

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

*Cantate*<sup>2</sup>

With a peaceful con-science,  
love as Christ loved us.

Supplementary Lectionary Series "B,"  
Epistles, adapted

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April 28, 2013

Potluck

Voters

WSC

<sup>16</sup> This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers [fellow believers in Jesus]. <sup>17</sup> If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? <sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. <sup>19</sup> This then is how we shall know that we belong to the truth, and, before him [God], we shall have confidence in our heart, <sup>20</sup> so that whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

<sup>21</sup> Dearly loved ones, whenever our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God, <sup>22</sup> and whatever we ask, we receive from him, because we are keeping his commands, and we are doing the things that are pleasing before him. <sup>23</sup> And this is his command: To believe in the Name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. <sup>24</sup> The one who keeps [treasures, guards] his [God's] commands, remains in him [God], and he [God remains] in him. And this is how we shall know that he [God] remains in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

♪ TRUE LOVE'S A MANY SPLENDORED THING ♪

I. GOD'S LOVE

II. BELIEVERS' LOVE

In the Name of Jesus, who loves us and gave himself for us, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

There are any number of songs about love – sad songs, joyful songs, funny songs, ridiculous songs:

♪ "Where, oh where, are you tonight? Why did you leave me here all alone? I searched the world over and thought I found true love. You loved another and phfffft you was gone!" ♪ "I hear ya knock'in but ya can't come in .... You say you love me but I can't

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> This Fifth Sunday of Easter is traditionally known as *Cantate*, Latin for "Sing!" We sing to the LORD a new song for he sent his Son who suffered, died and was raised for our forgiveness and salvation.

come in .... Come back tomorrow night and try it again.” ”I love you, since heaven knows when – there I’ve said it again!” ”I’m gonna love you forever – forever and ever again. Just as long as old men sit and talk about the weather, just as long as old women sit and talk about old men. I’m gonna love you forever – forever and ever. Amen.” ”All the world needs is love, love, love – love is all the world needs!”  
”Yes, true love’s a many splendored thing!” And on and on and on go the songs about love.

There is one statement in all of these songs that is correct, however – even though the lyrics and thought do not speak accurately – true love is, indeed, a many splendored thing.

The true love about which our text is speaking is not that about which today’s and yesterday’s “love songs” are written. The true love about which our text is speaking is that love which has as its highest objective and priority that which is in the best interests of the one being loved – both physical interests and spiritual interests. That is the kind of true love that God has for us; and, it is the kind of true love that we, believers in Jesus, are to have for others – especially for our fellow believers. To know about this TRUE LOVE then, we need to look at the true love of our LORD God:  TRUE LOVE’S A MANY SPLENDORED THING  I. GOD’S LOVE; and then, II. BELIEVERS’ LOVE.

 TRUE LOVE’S A MANY SPLENDORED THING   
I. GOD’S LOVE

The Apostle John begins by describing really true love. He says, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” (3:16a). John had been a close observer of this true love of Jesus.

The Apostle John had been a disciple of Jesus. He had accompanied Jesus during Jesus’ three-year public ministry. He had seen Jesus’ many miracles by which Jesus demonstrated his true love for people. He had heard Jesus prophesy that he would go up to Jerusalem, be betrayed into the hands of the Chief Priests and Leaders of the Jews; be condemned; be handed over to the Gentile-Romans; convicted; beaten, whipped, crucified, die and be buried; on the third day, Jesus would rise from the dead. John had been the one disciple at the foot of the cross when Jesus was suffering and dying. John had been the one to whom Jesus gave over the care of his mother Mary. John had seen Jesus’ true love in action. Indeed, true love was demonstrated as “Jesus laid down his life for us.”

It was through his suffering and death on the cross that Jesus had taken away the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29b,36b; 1 John 2:1b,2). Jesus’ resurrection from the dead assured John and all believers that Jesus is indeed God’s Son (Romans 1:1-5); that all people are

justified – declared righteous, sins forgiven, acquitted before God (Romans 4:25); and, that just as Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended into glory, so also believers would be raised from the dead on the Last Day to live with Jesus in heaven and in glory forever (John 14:19b).

John writes concerning this forgiveness of sins as he comforts souls distressed,

***<sup>19</sup> This then is how we shall know that we belong to the truth, and, before him [God], we shall have confidence in our heart, <sup>20</sup> so that whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything (3:19,20).***

Although believers in Jesus have forgiveness of sins – for Jesus' took away and forgave the sins of the whole world (cf. 2:1b,2) – believers still have consciences – hearts – that bother them because of their sinful nature and the outbreak of sin in their daily lives – sins of thoughts, words, actions, attitudes and behavior. How are such guilty consciences to be calmed and assuaged and given peace?

God knows the consciences of believers. God knows all things. God is greater than those consciences and the guilt that attacks them. St. Paul points to the greatness of God over the guilty consciences of believers when he says, "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20b). This is the point that God made also through his Old Testament Prophet Isaiah, when God said, "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem [that is, to all believers in Jesus], and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:2; cf. 61:7). The "double for all her sins" is a reference to double grace – again, "where sin increased, grace increased all the more." King David made the same observation in Psalm 103,

***<sup>10</sup> [The LORD God] does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.***

***<sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;***

***<sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:10-12).***

It is this overwhelming forgiveness of sins that takes away and covers over all offenses, transgressions and iniquities; and, that assures the troubled consciences of believers that they individually are forgiven. This forgiveness of sins also gives believers confidence to stand before God.

John writes, "Dearly loved ones, whenever our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God" (3:21). John here is describing the blessed status of the Christian. The Christian knows that he has been forgiven. The Christian latches on to and grasps that about which St. Paul speaks in his Epistle to the Ephesians: "We have redemption

through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Ephesians 1:7a). The Christian grasps what John said earlier in this First Epistle, “The blood of Jesus, [God’s] Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7b). John also deals with how a Christian can be so absolutely sure and certain of this forgiveness of sins and stand confidently before God.

The believer in Jesus, the Christian, knows that he or she cannot stand before God on his or her own. By nature every person, including Christians in this world, are “dead in transgressions and sins” and “by nature objects of [God’s] wrath” (Ephesians 2:1,3b). Every Christian on earth is forced to confess along with St. Paul, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature” (Romans 7:18a). Such truths also mean that the Christian did not come to believe in Jesus on his own. Each Christian believes he “cannot by [his] own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ [his] LORD or come to him.”<sup>3</sup> It is the Holy Spirit who works in a person to bring him to faith – to make of him a Christian – a believer in Jesus. John deals with this truth also.

John writes, “And this is how we shall know that he [God] remains in us: We know it by the Spirit he [God] gave us” (3:24b). In his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, St. Paul explains how God gives the Holy Spirit to people and thus makes Christians out of them. St. Paul states,

***<sup>13</sup> ... from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the Truth. <sup>14</sup> He called you to this through our Gospel, that you might share in the glory of our LORD Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13b,14).***

St. Paul refers to the work of the Holy Spirit as “sanctifying work” – “sanctification.” That term means to make holy, to set apart as special, to separate – to separate from a world of unbelievers who are going to hell and to place them by faith in Jesus among God’s people who are going to heaven – the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the Fellowship of All Believers in Jesus. St. Paul indicates that the Holy Spirit does this work through the “Gospel.” The Gospel is the Good News about Jesus – his entire life of holiness and perfection credited to all people; his suffering and death that took away and forgave the sins of all people; his resurrection which is the assurance that the sins of all people have been forgiven. Through this Gospel in Word and Sacraments – Holy Baptism and Holy Communion – the Holy Spirit creates and increases faith in the believer’s heart. By that faith, the believer knows that God lives in him – that the Holy Spirit lives in him.

The believer knows that by faith in Jesus, God lives in him; that the Holy Spirit lives in him. St. Paul writes in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is LORD,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3b). To “say, ‘Jesus is LORD,’” means more

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<sup>3</sup> Kuske, David P., *Luther’s Catechism – The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther and an Exposition for Children and Adults Written in Contemporary English* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Board for Parish Education, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1982), pp. 5, 188.

than just mouthing the words as some sort of pagan incantation or mantra. It means confessing that Jesus is a person's LORD and God and Savior and Redeemer. The confession of the mouth is the revelation of what the heart believes (cf. Romans 10:8-10). Thus, the believer knows that God dwells in him, that the Holy Spirit dwells in him – the believer knows this by the fact that he believes in Jesus as his Savior.

#### APPROPRIATION

Neither you nor I can believe in Jesus on our own. We too are by nature sinful and unclean. We too “cannot by [our] own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ [our] LORD or come to him” (Kuske, *Luther's Catechism, loc. cit.*) We cannot choose to believe in Jesus (cf. John 15:16). We cannot decide to believe in Jesus. Like all people, we too by nature are dead in transgressions and sins. Dead people can do nothing. But the Holy Spirit has made us alive.

The Holy Spirit made us alive – spiritually alive – by bringing us to faith in Jesus. St. Paul points to this truth for you and me when he says, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:4,5). God “made us alive with Christ.” The way in which God brings us to this spiritual life is through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments – Holy Baptism and Holy Communion (cf. Kuske, *Luther's Catechism*, ¶ 222, p. 192).

Through the work of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel, you and I were made spiritually alive – we were brought to faith in Jesus. St. Paul testifies to this truth simply: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). “The Word of Christ” is “the message.” “The Word of Christ,” “the message,” is the Gospel – the Good News about Jesus. As you and I continue in this Gospel, we retain faith in Jesus as our Savior. On the other hand, if we do not continue in this Gospel, we are lost.

Jesus told the Jews, “He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God” (John 8:47). When you or I are not hearing God's Word, are not meditating on God's Word, are not listening – then we are despising God's Word, and we do not belong to God. The temptation for such indifference is always present for us on this side of eternity. That is why Jesus also said, “If you continue in my Word, then you really are my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (cf. John 8:31,32).

Continuing and remaining in Jesus' Word – God's Word, the Bible – creates and preserves faith in Jesus in our hearts. That faith believes and confesses the truths that Jesus came into the world, lived a perfect life, suffered and died on the cross for the punishment that we and all people deserve, and rose again on Easter Sunday morning as the guarantee that the sins of the world have been paid for – that our sins have been paid for.

God's love then is seen especially in Jesus' work of redeeming us from sin, death and the grave, from hell and from the devil and his power. That love of God is the motivation for believers also to love others – for us to love others – especially our fellow believers.

♪ TRUE LOVE'S A MANY SPLENDORED THING ♪

- I. GOD'S LOVE; and now,
- II. BELIEVERS' LOVE

Like God's love, believers' love is going to look for that which is best for the one being loved. In other words, sometimes the true love of believers will speak discipline; other times the true love of believers will comfort and console and encourage. The love believers have for others will have its base in both Law and Gospel. In connection with the love of believers, John refers to God's commands.

John writes, "And this is [God's] command: To believe in the Name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us" (3:23). The believing and faith in God's Son, Jesus, as has already been seen, is accomplished in the work of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel to bring a person to faith in Jesus and to keep a person in faith in Jesus (supra, pp. 4,5). Believers in Jesus will show to others the same love which God has shown to them.

John says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers [that is, for our fellow believers in Jesus]" (3:16). Believers are to be willing to lay down their lives for their fellow-believers. This follows the pattern about which Jesus spoke and which Jesus exemplified when he said, "Greater love has no one than this, that [a man] lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). In addition, believers will also use their resources to help their fellow believers who are in need.

John states, "Little children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (3:18). It is kind of like "putting your money where your mouth is." Here, it is putting one's actions to match his confession of faith in Jesus. John gives an example, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" (3:17). The Apostle James says the same thing: "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?" (James 2:15,16). Faith in Jesus will be put into action in works of love. Such loving action – good works – is possible by believers only by faith in Jesus.

By faith in Jesus, a believer shows his love toward others. Remember that John said, "The one who keeps [treasures, guards] [God's] commands, remains in [God], and [God] in him. And this is how we shall know that [God] remains in us: We know it by the Spirit [God] gave us" (3:24). That first command of God is "to believe in the Name of his Son, Jesus Christ" (3:23a). God's second command is built upon the first: "Love one another"

(3:23b). No one can truly love others without faith in Jesus, for the writer to the Hebrews states, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6a). John goes on to explain God's action on behalf of those who believe in his Son Jesus.

John says, "Whatever we ask, we receive from [God], because we are keeping his commands, and we are doing the things that are pleasing before him" (3:22). Obviously, "keeping [God's] commands," is going to be pleasing to God. Remember again the two parts of God's commands: To believe in his Son; and, to love others. Faith in God's, Son, Jesus, is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit sent into the believer's heart through the Gospel. Loving others is the second part of God's command. It is thus that believers do what pleases God and that God gives to believers that for which they ask.

#### APPLICATION

What if ... what if you and I ask God for something but we do not receive it? The Apostle James answers that question. He says to you and to me,

***<sup>2</sup> You want something but do not get it.... You do not have, because you do not ask God. <sup>3</sup> When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures*** (cf. James 4:2,3)

You and I as believers will desire to ask God in accordance with God's will. This again depends upon the work of God. St. Paul says, "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). The content of our prayers to God, will be in conformity to God's will as expressed in his Word. That will of God at work in our hearts as believers will make us awake, alert and aware, of what is going on around us, so that, perceiving a need, we can respond properly to that need. St. Paul says the same thing in his Epistle to the Galatians, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). At the same time, we as believers in Jesus will confess that our love and good works are not loving enough or good enough (cf. Isaiah 64:6).

Our love and good works by themselves are not good enough. If they were, then we could claim salvation for ourselves on the basis of what we ourselves do and feel. That is not enough for salvation. Rather, our faith and our salvation come through believing the Gospel. Love and good works flow from that faith, just as Jesus said in our Gospel lesson this morning (cf. John 15:1-8). Jesus said, "I Am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). By faith in Jesus, you and I are attached to Jesus as vines are attached to the branch. By that faith in Jesus, you and I will bring forth love and good works toward others as fruits of faith in Jesus.

#### CONCLUSION

Indeed, ♪TRUE LOVE'S A MANY SPLENDORED THING.♪ But the hundreds of popular songs – past and present – do not understand it. True love is seen in God's Love for us, when he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to be our Savior. It is that love of God for us in Jesus, that moves, motivates and guides you and me as believers in Jesus, to love others, especially our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Love one another as Jesus loved us. Amen.