

SUMMER of LOVE

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

1st John 3.11-18, Genesis 4.1-12
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I. Connecting With One Another

Have you ever been asked a loaded question (that is, a question that carries with it a hidden purpose or presumption of guilt)? What was it? How did you answer?

II. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our "Summer of Love" series in the Letter of First John, engaging 3.11-18. In these verses, we again hear John's command to love one another in the church as a visible manifestation of our faith in Christ. In instructing his community of believers, John recalls the ancient story of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve.

In so doing, John asks a couple loaded questions of his own, and by inference, calls to mind Cain's question to God after he murdered his younger brother Abel: "Am I my brother's keeper?" As we will see, an appropriate response to that question - which echoes through the centuries - could be, "Actually, yes! You are!"

III. Study the Text

- a. Reread last week's passage 1st John 3.4-10, then continue through verse 18. What is John implying in the loaded questions found in verses 12 and 17? How would you respond to these questions?

- b. In verse 11, John repeats a similar phrase used in the opening of his letter. Turn back to and read 1st John 1.1-4. Why do you think John returns to this opening phrase?

In chapter 3, John discusses "loving one another," while in chapter 1 he speaks of "fellowship." What, if anything, do these two ideas have in common?

- c. Verse 12 contains a reference to Cain and Abel as a negative example of how Christians are not to live. To get the full context of John's thought here, read Genesis 4.1-12. What does it say about why Cain murdered his little brother? How does reading that story help clarify what John is getting at?

With the context of Genesis 4 in mind, read 3.13 again. In light of Genesis 4, why should we not be surprised if the world hates us?

In other words, if we're supposed to not be like Cain, are we supposed to be like Abel? If so, what about us would "the world" not like?

- d. In verse 14, we read that we know we have passed from death to life *because* we love one another, not that we will pass from death to life *if* we love one another. How are the two different?

That is, is loving one another something that *reveals what has already happened* or a *requirement in order to achieve* eternal life?

- e. One commentator notes, "It should be emphasized that spiritual life does not result from loving our brothers [and sisters]. Love for our brothers [and sisters] is the evidence, not the basis for spiritual life."

Why is this distinction important?

- f. In verse 15, a rather bold statement is made. Reread it out loud. How do you understand this verse? Are hateful feelings really the same as murder!?

Turn to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.21-24. How do Jesus' words here clarify John's statement in verse 15?

It has been noted, "Hatred is the wish that the other person was not there; it is the refusal to recognize [their] rights as a person, the longing that [they] might be dead. We may not like to put the point quite so frankly, but it is good that the real character of hatred should be so unambiguously displayed, so as to warn us against it. If I hate somebody, I am no different from a murderer in my attitude toward him."

Do you agree or disagree?

- g. Reread 1st John 3.16-18. In clarifying that Jesus - unlike Cain - is the true elder brother who sacrificially gave His life for us, John instructs us to similarly show our love for one another in concrete, material ways.

Turn to Matthew 25.31-46 and Acts 2.42-47. How do Jesus' words in Matthew or Luke's account of the early church help you think of concrete, material ways you could serve others in our church community?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. In what ways have you seen envy poison a relationship like Cain and Abel's? Was it a working relationship? A relative? A friend?
- b. Have you ever experienced persecution (be it large or small) because of your Christian faith? Why do you think you were the target?
- c. In what ways do you feel you need to *achieve* or *earn* God's love?
- d. In what ways have you experienced hatred? Did someone hate you? Have you hated someone? How did it affect your relationship? How did it affect your spiritual life?
- e. How have others shown you their love in concrete, material ways? How have you shown love to others? In what ways can you now hear God's voice calling you to do so?

V. Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Lift up Vacation Bible School coming up at the end of July, asking that God would use the activities, songs, lessons and volunteers to draw children into a lifelong relationship with Him,
- b. Thank God for S.H.I.P., and all those who have served the past couple weeks, asking that the Holy Spirit would continue to use believers to lovingly serve others in concrete, material ways,
- c. Ask Jesus to guide our ongoing discernment process with Los Ranchos Presbytery.