



Divine Dining

An invitation to feed ourselves from God's Banquet

Week 5

Loving



Love – more than words.

Warm-up question: “Love is...”

Think back to a moment when someone offered you an act of practical love: it may have been a drink of cold water on a hot afternoon, the lending of a coat on a cold morning, an unexpected word of encouragement just when you most needed it. When has a simple, sacrificial action on someone else's part really affected you and spoken to you?

Read: 1 John 3:11-24

Discuss

1. John urges us not to be “...like Cain, [who] murdered his brother”. What do you think ‘being like Cain’ might mean in our own society and our own lives? In what ways might we attack one another, which are perhaps more subtle than Cain’s but which may nonetheless be destructive in someone’s life? (you may find it interesting and helpful to remember that Cain was motivated primarily by jealousy!)
2. “Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.” How does the world demonstrate a hatred of goodness? Why do you think this is? In what ways do you think Cain-like activity in is encouraged by and rooted in our society? How can we, as Christians, build up our resistance to this malign influence?
3. “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” Think about this example of love, and contrast it with ideas and definitions of love more commonly used in our culture – in the media, advertising and the arts, for example (a quick think-back to Valentine’s Day will doubtless furnish some examples!). What are the aspects of Jesus’ love which make his life, and his death, so radical, powerful and counter-cultural as a definition of love?
4. John gives an example of what it might mean in practical terms for us to lay down our lives for one another; sharing our possessions with one who is without. Why do you think John chooses to focus on love expressed materially?
5. The passage makes an explicit connection between our willingness to express love in action and our confidence before God. In what ways have you experienced this connection, or seen it in others? Why do you think this is?



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Who in our lives needs a practical act of love from us?

6. Our passage this week suggests to us that practicing love in action towards one another is a spiritual discipline, a means by which we can grow in our relationship with God as well as in community with one another.

How do you think we might make this a continuing reality in our lives, without our love becoming either a legalistic or an essentially religious act, or allowing our acts of love towards one another to be motivated by the expectation of reward rather than the example of Jesus and his compassion?

Reflect: Read out aloud the Message version of our passage, which sets out John's words with great power and simplicity:

My dear children, let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love. This is the only way we'll know we're living truly, living in God's reality. It's also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves.

And friends, once that's taken care of and we're no longer accusing or condemning ourselves, we're bold and free before God! We're able to stretch our hands out and receive what we asked for because we're doing what he said, doing what pleases him. Again, this is God's command: to believe in his personally named Son, Jesus Christ. He told us to love each other, in line with the original command. As we keep his commands, we live deeply and surely in him, and he lives in us. And this is how we experience his deep and abiding presence in us: by the Spirit he gave us.

Use this passage to lead you into prayers thanking God for the love he has lavished on us in Jesus, and asking him to fill our hearts with that same love.

Respond:

Pray for one another –

That we will remember this week that God is bigger than our worried hearts.

For a new level of freedom from debilitating self-criticism.

For the wisdom to recognise where we are being asked to demonstrate love in practical ways this week, and for the courage to respond.

Look for opportunities to put this resolution into practice.