



## “The Easter People: 5. One Last Time”

Text: 1 John 5:1-6

*a sermon by Kevin Fleming*

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

You are so lucky to be here today. Because of all the festivities, the recognition of musicians and teachers, the welcoming of new members, and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, there is about three and one-half minutes available for the sermon. (Please hold your applause until the end of the service.)

And if you have been here at least half of the time since Easter, you can probably write this sermon yourself. We're concluding our time with the lessons from the First Letter of John. Our series of sermons has been under the title, “The Easter People.” The First Letter of John tells us much about who God is and what it means to be God's people in Jesus Christ.

When we think of the epistles – the letters – that appear in the New Testament, we immediately think of the letters of the Apostle Paul. Paul was well-trained in the law and writes his letters much as a lawyer constructs an argument. When you read Paul's letters, always look for the word “therefore,” and then read backwards. The “therefore” is the summary statement and everything that precedes it is the argument Paul is trying to make.

That's not the way the First Letter of John is written. The letter is not linear – moving from point to point in a logical progression. Instead, the First Letter of John is somewhat circular, going around and around, recapitulating previous statements and revisiting already articulated ideas.

A few of you have mentioned to me that some of the lessons in First John have reminded you of songs you learned as children. “Praise him, praise, him, all you little children, God is love, God is love.” “God is love, His mercy brightens, all the paths on which we rove...God is wisdom, God is love.”

That’s one of the principle lessons of First John. God is not vindictive, not cruel, not seeking to punish. God is not an ogre that plays with mortals as God pleases. God does not bring misery nor does God impose tests and trials.

God is love – self-giving, self-sacrificing, gracious and merciful love. God is with us in our sufferings and in our sorrows. God strengthens us, encourages us, laughs with us, weeps with us. God is love.

And if God is love, then God’s people are called to be people who live that same kind of love every day. As God loves, so are we to love. As God cares, so are we to care. As God is compassionate, so are we to be compassionate. As God gives Godself away, so we are called to give ourselves away.

Our love has two central points of focus. We are called to love God and we are called to love neighbor. This is the very heart of the Christian life. The Christian life is marked by love, not hate, not falsehoods, not bullying, not the abuse of another, not treachery, not prejudice. Anyone who tells you otherwise is a liar.

God is love and we are called to be people of love.

And that is what the author of the First Letter of John is getting at in our lesson for today. “Everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey God’s commandments.” When we are living with love for God and love for neighbor, we are living the life God created us to live. It is authentic and genuine life. It is life that makes sense and brings blessing. It is a life that is a channel of God’s grace and love. It is a life that brings healing and wholeness to the brokenness of our world and its people.

This is the life God calls us – dare we say – commands us to live. God does not want God’s people to live another kind of life that fractures people from each other, or raises up some at the cost of diminishing others. God does not want some to have more than enough while others have nothing at all. God does not want us to live self-centered lives that put our worries and wants ahead of the needs of others.

God wants – even commands - us to be people of love.

And then, there’s this: “And God’s commandments are not burdensome.” You may want to take exception to that statement, but consider what we’re being told. Love for God and love for neighbor may seem exceptionally strange and difficult. But, when you begin to practice love, it becomes natural and even easy.

There was another song we learned long ago. The words went, "Love is nothing 'til you give it away, give it away, give it away. Love is nothing 'til you give it away, then you'll end up having more. It's just like a magic penny, hold it tight and you won't have any. But lend it, spend it and you'll have so many, they'll roll all over the floor."

When we give love away, we discover that there is, in fact, a boundless, endless amount of love to share, because God is love, and God is endless and boundless. And when our neighbors experience love - especially from us - they grow in love and begin to share it - and others experience it and they grow in love and begin to share it. And on and on and on it goes.

Looking for good news? Try that on.

One last time: God is love and we are called to be people of love.

That's what it means to be the Easter people.

And my time us up.

Love. For now and evermore. Amen.



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