

If you read any person's biography, it always begins and ends the same way. They were born and eventually they died. A more polite thing to say would be to say they passed away, or they passed on. For us it's totally different. We pass on from death to life! It's all backwards. We start at death and end with life. That is an amazing thing! We have a sure hope that changes our perspective on everything! But it took a lot to give us life. Jesus had to lay down his own life for us. The world often struggles to define what love is, but you can't get a better definition than this. True love means that you are willing to give everything for another person, even your life. Through God's grace we know what love is. Jesus gave up his life for us, let us be willing to do the same for others.

Saying something is true, doesn't make it true. So how do we know that we have passed on from death to life? A good answer always is, because the Bible says so. But even the Bible gives us the proof. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love each other. We know we are going to heaven because we can see the good things we do for others.

Woah! Slow down! That doesn't sound very Lutheran, that sounds like works righteousness! Why is John telling us that we know we are going to heaven by looking at how we love each other? He doesn't mean that we save ourselves because we are good people who love each other. John is talking to mature Christians. He can safely assume that they already know that Jesus has washed their sins away and that he is the one who gives them life. John can even assume that they know that everyone who has faith has the Holy Spirit in them to produce good works. John is pointing to the works which are result of faith as evidence for our salvation. He starts at the end result and jumps back to the source. We know that, because we are saved by Jesus, we will produce fruits of faith; loving each other is behind all good works done for others.

Yet when there are no fruits of faith and only sinful actions, there is evidence that there is no faith and therefore only death in sin. A recent popular, (or unpopular slogan, depending on your political views), has been love trumps hate. It would be nice if this phrase didn't carry so much baggage, otherwise it would have made for a good theme for today's sermon, yet it still can be used and remembered in a biblical way. A Christian's attitude towards each other should be one of love and not hate. Sometimes Christian love may involve saying things that aren't popular, things that won't make you many friends in the world. Speaking the truth in love to one another may be one of the hardest things to do.

Sadly I have seen some cases where people have shouted and displayed the "Love Trumps Hate" slogan and then in the same breath scream how they *hate* this or that person. You and I often do the same thing. We confess our faith with our mouths every Sunday. We can wear our faith proudly as we go out into the world. People expect Christians to show love and kindness, yet how often do we express feelings of hate to our own spouses, parents, siblings, and our brothers and sisters in Christ? John warns us that if we live in hatred we live as murderers! As people who have forfeited our eternal life! When Jesus tells us that hate equals murder in God's eyes, none of us can say we are innocent.

This brings us to the true meaning of love. Jesus laid down his life for us. Jesus showed us love, when the whole world gave him hate. When Jesus came to this earth he lived to be a substitute for all, to live a life that pleases God, a life without any hate, but only love. When Jesus died on the cross, he paid for all sins, including the sins of hate of people in the past, for the sins of those who were mocking, torturing, and killing him, and for all sins, including the sins of hate of all people after him, including you and me. When Jesus died for us he did so selflessly. There was nothing we did to make him want to die for us. That is love, willing to die to save others who don't even deserve it.

There is a story about a mule that was part of a trade caravan in the Old West. This mule had formed a particular loyalty and attachment to a mare who wanted nothing to do with him and would bite and kick at him. But he would follow her everywhere she went. When the time came for the mare to go across the mountains with the army, the mule was supposed to stay behind with the other mules in the comfort of a frontier town. But so strong was his loyalty to her that he broke away and followed the mare

through the mountains. The first day the mule collapsed in exhaustion and everyone thought he would die by the side of the road, but at 10pm he was heard braying and running toward the mare. The next day, the mule fell down again, but returned at midnight. The next day, still in the mountains, the mule collapsed by the side of the trail, and was never seen again. In the end, the mule died for nothing. The mare hated him. This mule died out of love for the mare. Take that story and multiply it by billions. Jesus died for all the people in the world, even though they hate him. Jesus stubbornly follows us even when we try to get away. That is how we know what love is. Jesus didn't die for nothing like that mule, he died to save us and give us eternal life.

Since we have been shown such amazing love, shouldn't we show love to others? John says we ought to! When we believe in the love that God has shown us through Jesus, we have the love of God himself in us. God uses us to spread and show his very own love to others. There's no escaping it, anyone who has God's love shows God's love. Like a living fruit tree, we will produce fruits of faith.

How do we show this love? I say I love you to my wife everyday, but when I don't walk the walk, she has every right to question whether or not I mean what I say. John tells us to love, but "not with words or speech, but with actions and truth." It's easy enough to talk about love, but doing it is what shows it best. There are many cases of love in this congregation. Prayers, words of kindness and genuine care for one another. Chances are that you have had the opportunity to help others who needed help, or that you have received help yourself. Continue to look for ways to help and love each other.

I know we can think of nice things to do for each other. It isn't hard to buy your mom flowers on mother's day, but sometimes showing love in truth is much harder. Telling the unmarried couple who say they are Christians but are living together right next door about God's word and loving will for them, or talking to an old friend who has announced that he or she has decided to live in a homosexual lifestyle might be one of the most uncomfortable things for you to do. But loving each other with God's truth, is showing them the best kind of love possible. The ultimate truth of God's love, is that he did everything necessary to give you absolute forgiveness and an eternity in paradise.

We can rejoice because we know we have passed from death into life. We can trace all of the love we show others back to the love God showed us when Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice and laid down his life for us. The world may struggle to know what love is, but we can tell them with our words and actions. We know what love is because Jesus loved us first. Amen.

1. How do we know that love is?
 2. What's the proof that we have passed from death to life?
 3. Who is John talking to?
 4. What things does John assume in this letter?
 5. In what way does a Christian live by "love trumps hate"?
 6. What are we considered when we hate?
 7. How did Jesus show love?
 8. How is Jesus like the mule? How is he better?
 9. How is it impossible for a Christian not to show love?
 10. What is the best way to show love?
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1. Explain how looking at our works proves we are saved. Discuss the dangers of only focusing on what we do to reassure ourselves of our salvation.
 2. Is it ever acceptable to hate a person? Is it ever acceptable to hate a thing?
 3. Share a time when it was really hard to show love, but was worth it.
 4. Do you think Christians have a reputation of people who love others? Explain why or why not.