

## **Find God's Love in One Another**

Rev. John Allen

Kids ask the hardest theological questions.

One of the children in this church once caught me off guard with a doozie a few years ago.

It was only about 3 minutes before the service was supposed to start and I was about to walk in to the sanctuary when she stopped me to ask.

“How do we know that God is real?”

It was a great question, and I am sure I didn't have a great answer in the moment. But, as children often do, she was forthrightly and succinctly asking something that many of us —if not all of us— have probably wondered at some point.

“How do we know that God is real?”

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One reason this is such a natural question is that a lot of the ways that we think about God are incredibly abstract. Invisible, everywhere, an all powerful being, who speaks although without making actual sounds, who moves, but is also everywhere. Whose presence maybe we can feel? But how can we be sure?

This is the great gift of Jesus. That in Jesus' incarnation, we have an encounter with God's real presence in the world. We get to see how God treats real people when God is standing face to face with them.

We get to see how God stands up to the powerful on behalf of the lowly.

We get to hear God's teaching and wisdom in words that we can understand.

Jesus shows us what God's love looks like in this world.

Which is great.

But that was also a long time ago by now. None of us were there. We have the beautiful stories transmitted across the generations. We have the mysterious sacraments baptism, and communion, by which we connect through our senses to the real presence of Christ in our midst.

All these things feed some of our desire to encounter God's presence in the world.

But I think if we are honest, they also still leave us wanting for something.

How do we really know, that God is real?

How do we really feel and encounter the presence of God in our real lives, right now?

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The answer is love.

These words from today's reading lay a clear path for us.

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves... knows God.... No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us"

Let us love one another. For in loving one another, we will know God. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us.

This is the enduring point of access given to us, to connect with the heart of who God is. Each week during worship we pause to pass the peace of Christ to one another.

Maybe you look forward to that moment as an opportunity to offer a warm greeting to your neighbor you haven't met yet, or say hello to an old friend.

Perhaps its not your favorite moment and you would prefer to keep to yourself.

But this moment is not just about greeting each other. It is about greeting God. We take this time in worship to turn and face one another, because we believe that one of the places where we encounter the real presence of the living God is in our connections with each other.

Because if we take moments to look upon each other with love, then we will come to know God.

And lest you think that this is just another abstract answer to the question, the love we are talking about here is not just some warm feeling. It is the fruit of intention. It is something we build together.

Think of the most loving relationships in your life. It probably didn't just happen. That love has most likely been the hard-won result of a lot of time spent together, sitting together facing some of life's biggest challenges, working through arguments, forgiving each other, sharing deep and vulnerable parts of your self and your story.

While often the origins of love may feel mysterious and like they come upon us from out of the blue sky. Enduring love is the fruit of committed presence, deep sharing, and vulnerability.

That is also the kind of love that exposes us to God.

This —beloved— is the heart of our task. The core of our calling in this community. To bring God's love to life. And that is not an abstract task. We bring God's love to life, by loving. By doing the real, tangible, work of building a community of loving relationships.

Over the past few months, we have been organizing our congregations into small groups. As of this morning we have, \_\_\_ people signed up for these groups and we are planning to have \_\_\_ groups.

If you have not yet signed up for one of these groups, and would like to, there is still time. Please let us know using one of the connection cards in the pews that you would like to participate and we will be in touch.

These groups will be fun, they will be a great opportunity to build new friendships and to grow more connected as a church.

But to be clear these groups are about more than making new friends. They are about doing what we need to do in order to encounter the presence of God. They are about doing the

tangible work of building a beloved community by sharing our stories, supporting and caring for one another, and growing to love one another with Christian love.

Because we believe, that if we love one another we will know God.

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Perhaps you have had this question before.

“How do we know that God is real?”

I think often we imagine that the answer to this question lies at the end of some deep philosophical inquiry, or at the heart of an inspiring sermon, or buried in the pages of some ancient sacred text.

We search our own hearts and we search the heavens for the presence of God. We wonder, and wrestle, in the loneliness of our own minds and the silence of our own hearts.

What scripture tells us today should be good news.

“Let us love one another. For in loving one another, we will know God. No one has ever seen God but if we love one another, God lives in us.”

Just look around. Love these people. And you will come to know God.

Religion is a team sport. It only works when we do it together. Our ability to be personally connected to God is sustained by participation in community. It is nurtured when we show up to worship together, when we sing together, and when we sit in circles to share the truth of our lives with one another.

That is how we will come to know that God is real.