

6th Sunday in Easter, Year A, May 29, 2011 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

based on 1John 3:11-18 written by Pastor Paul Horn

This is how we know what love is...

I. Christ laid down his life for us

II. We will lay down our lives for each other

When I was a little boy, there was a book that I checked out of the public library in Rhinelander, WI with some frequency. The cover was army green, well used, and its pages contained story after story of heroic acts of bravery by men and women from all branches of Armed Forces during WWII. Stories about Soldiers whose planes were shot down behind enemy lines and they made their way back; men who were captured and escaped, men who showed resiliency while captured waiting to be freed by Allied Forces. These stories fascinated me that men and women had such strength and courage.

These same stories will be told and retold this Memorial Day Weekend as we remember those who sacrificed while in service of their country. No doubt you can hear those stories if you watch the History Channel, Military Channel, or attend the weekend of history on Fort Knox and other military installations around the country. Some of these stories will touch our hearts. Others will make our hearts ache. These tales will be told by men and women with eyes that stare off into nothingness and tears that run down the cheek, because they will recall the atrocities witnessed, the horror of experienced, horrible things that human beings should not have to see or participate in, the hatred people have for one another, which fuels wars that continue to this day.

This epidemic of hate not only seen in war, but around the world. Why? What causes it? This week I read an article on the internet that asked these questions, “What did the Jews do to arouse Nazi hatred, what did blacks do to cause whites to lynch them, what did Ukrainians do to arouse Stalin's hatred or what did the Tibetans do to incite China's hateful treatment of them, what did America do to elicit the hatred of Muslim terrorists?” A commentator responded, “Those of us who listened to our mothers, grandmothers and pastors know that greed and hate have always existed and will always exist. No one needs to do anything to be hated. Call it the human condition or call it original sin, it's there.” <http://patriotpost.us/opinion/dennis-prager/2011/05/10/how-leftism-poisoned-a-psychiatrists-mind/>

This individual had it right; original sin is the cause of hate. When the LORD God created this world human beings had perfect peace and harmony with each other, and most importantly, with their God. But when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command that peace was ruined. The words recorded in Genesis 5 still haunt us to this day, “**Adam had a son in his image, in his likeness.**” It didn't take long for Adam and Eve to figure out that this image of man was not the image they had once possessed, as with grief and heartache they buried one of their sons, Abel, after their oldest son murdered him in cold blood.

These stories about Cain and Abel were recorded and preserved for us to serve as warnings for you and me. Yes, you heard me right. There was probably a piece inside of you that cringed just a little bit when you heard those words, "A warning... for me? But I'm not a murderer!" If we look closely at the dear Apostle John's letter this morning, we see that the 5th commandment does not just address those who commit the act of taking someone's life, but the apostle says here that those who are filled with hatred and anger are the murderers. This also drives the dagger a little deeper into our hearts. We do not want to hear it, and excuse it and protest, "But I don't hate, I'm not angry at anyone..."

We looked at Adam and Eve's family... let's look at yours. Is there a parent, a son or daughter, a brother or sister, a cousin, an aunt or uncle, who at one time said something... or did something... and the fact that you're recalling that "something" now makes your blood boil... I don't need to say anymore. John's words drive the knife through our hearts, "**Anyone who hates is a murderer.**"

In this letter, the apostle John was also talking about a brother or sister in Christ, a fellow believer. Is there someone in this congregation, or another Christian friend, whom you don't really speak to anymore, someone with whom you become very defensive whenever they begin to speak... "**Anyone who hates is a murderer.**"

John goes into another area of hate that we don't talk much about. He says, "When you see a brother or sister in Christ in need and don't do anything about it, you show that you are loveless and don't care. You're really hating, which is murder." (vs17) A fellow believer is in need, lacking clothing, food, shelter, and you have the means to assist... and we're not talking about enabling poor choices. We're not talking about giving so that your family suffers from lack of their needs, but helping those who need help... and you see this, and you do not do anything about it... then, John says, we are not showing love. This is sin. And God is serious about sin. "**No murderer has eternal life in him.**" This is serious business, this hatred and anger. I don't know about you, but these words from God to me cause me to fall on my knees and confess, "Forgive me, O Lord, for my hatred, for my lovelessness, for my murder against my brothers and sisters."

We know that the opposite of hatred is love. And not just any kind of love. Anyone can say, "I love you," but talk is cheap. Will you put that love into action? The Greek word John uses for love here is *agape*. *Agape* love is love that shows itself, it proves itself, it is love that seeks the unloved, it is love that seeks the benefit of others.

These are the kind of stories that will be told this weekend, stories of love and sacrifice, stories like that of Sergeant First Class Paul R. Smith who distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action with an armed enemy near Baghdad International Airport, Baghdad, Iraq on 4 April 2003. On that day, Sergeant First Class Smith was engaged in the construction of a prisoner of war holding area when his Task Force was violently attacked by a company-sized enemy force. Realizing the vulnerability of over 100 fellow soldiers, Sergeant First Class Smith quickly organized a hasty defense. As the fight developed, Sergeant First Class Smith braved hostile enemy fire to personally engage the enemy with hand grenades and anti-tank weapons, and organized the evacuation of three wounded soldiers from an armored personnel carrier struck by a rocket propelled grenade and a 60mm mortar round. Fearing the enemy would overrun their defenses, Sergeant First Class Smith moved under withering enemy fire to man a .50 caliber machine gun mounted on a damaged armored personnel carrier. In total disregard for his own life, he

maintained his exposed position in order to engage the attacking enemy force. During this action, he was mortally wounded. His courageous actions helped defeat the enemy attack, and resulted in as many as 50 enemy soldiers killed, while allowing the safe withdrawal of numerous wounded soldiers. Sergeant First Class Smith's extraordinary heroism and uncommon valor earned him the Medal of Honor.

I'm sure that Sergeant First Class Smith didn't go to the airfield that day thinking, "Today I'm going to sacrifice my life for my battle buddies." You have a Soldier who marched onto the field of battle, knowing full well that he would die, and die in your place, and he willingly did so. John said, **"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."** Jesus went to die for you and for me; for our hatred, for our lovelessness, for our indifference and uncaring attitudes toward brothers and sisters, we ought to have died. But Jesus died instead. He laid down on the grenade of God's wrath. His body absorbed the blast of hell's torture of the devil's fury. He allowed death's arms to wrap around his body. For what? So that you might be spared and given life.

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." Love shows itself, with total disregard for himself, and concerned only with the benefit of others. Jesus, out of his love for you, laid down his life, for all people, even the unlovable! Even for men like Cain, for Adam and Eve, who by their sin have infected all people with the sinful nature and with death, for them he died! What love! Even for those who hate God and God's people, who sadly throw God's love away, he died for them. A few weeks ago when Osama bin Laden was killed, we prayed in church, "What if he had heard Bible stories when he was little boy?" that got us thinking, "That could have been me. I could have been that man!" But by the grace of God go I! But here I am, and here you are! It is by God's grace, his love for you, that he sought you out, and by his love that he washed you in water and his Word and made you his child. By his love for you he covered you in Christ's perfect sacrifice. Through faith, you have been washed of your sins of hatred, and lavished with Christ's acts of love, to be presented perfect, holy, and sinless before the throne of God.

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." How do we adequately say thank you? John shows us the way, "We ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." (vs16) Now, most of us will not find ourselves in a combat situation where we could sacrifice our lives for someone else. So how can we say thank you by laying down our lives for our brothers and sisters in Christ? John goes on, **"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."** (vs17-18)

We will sacrifice by setting aside our stubborn pride and approach those brothers or sisters in Christ, those family members, who have offended us and we will freely forgive them. We will sacrifice by setting aside our stubborn pride and offer forgiveness to those who apologize to us. We will point them to Christ's cross for forgiveness.

We will sacrifice by opening our eyes and looking for those opportunities to provide material possessions to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need. One of the ways that we can do that is through our WELS Christian Aid and Relief. Did you know that this organization uses 97% of donations for aid and relief efforts? Not only is money used for physical needs of those ravaged by natural disasters, but as missionaries and

pastors and congregations serve those affected by disaster, the Lord often opens doors so that these brothers and sisters in Christ can share the healing message of the gospel. For some of us, God has generously blessed with the financial means to do so. God has blessed others with hands to work. The WELS Christian Aid and Relief offers the opportunity to lay people to actually travel to locations afflicted by natural disaster to assist with rebuilding. This is how we can show love. Some do have pocket books overflowing, some have hands that are weak. But God has blessed each of us with the ability to fold those hands, and to boldly stand before the throne of God on behalf of those suffering. This is how we will show love.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, this is how we know what love is: Christ Jesus laid down his life for you. This is how we will say thank you: by laying down our life for our brothers and sisters in Christ. May our Risen Savior grant this to us all. Amen.

For more information about WELS Christian Aid and Relief go to:

<http://www.wels.net/christian-aid-and-relief/about-christian-aid-and-relief>

or call Pastor Robert Hein, chairman, at 262-334-7881 or Mr. Mark Vance, director of operations, at 414-416-6396.