

Title: Loving the Church for all the right reasons
Text: 2 John 1-3
Theme: God made the church for us to love and be loved
Series: 2 John
Prop Stmtnt: We love the church because she embodies all that is right and true.

John was one of the 12 disciples of Christ. The gospel of John and Revelation are the major works of John, but he also wrote this triad of epistles that we call 1, 2 and 3rd John. 2nd and 3rd John are each one chapter and easily overlooked, but while they are short, they are sweet and so helpful for our view of and life as a church. My soul has been fed well in my study and I pray that yours will be fed well as a result. We will study 2 John in August and 3 John in September.

Read Text:

We have seen how fans can have a love/hate relationship with some athletes. I remember years ago, how much Red Wing fans hated Chris Chelios when he played for the Blackhawks, but when he signed with us, we loved him! But it happens in reverse. You love the athlete as long as he/she makes much of you by helping your team win, but as soon as they sign with another team, well, “a pox on them and their house” right? Do you have people like that in your life? Do you know people who are in a relationship with you primarily because of what you can do for them, but not because they actually care about you? This is pretty normal for our world. Sadly, it describes a lot of marriages too. But is it possible that we view church like that?

So, here are a couple of questions for you and me to chew on. One, do you and I love the church? Do I love you? Do I love you because you attend and make me feel important because I have a crowd to talk to or do, I actually love you? Do you love the church? Do you love the people in the church? We know that Jesus loves the church. Ephesians 5.25 says, “*Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*” We do not love the church as perfectly, purely and deeply as Christ does, but do we love the church? And related to that, if you do love the church, why do you love her? Do you love her because she makes much of you? I.e., this is the place where I get to showcase my talents? Or, do you take your lead from Jesus and love her? Is your heart large enough to be able to actually love like that?

2 and 3 John give us a view of the church that is radically different than the program-driven, consumer-savvy, brand-polishing, image-pushing, trend-setting, culture-reflecting stuff that the church has been gagging on for the past 30 years. In fact, 2 and 3 John give us a view of the local church that is marked by loving her for all of the right reasons. John does not see church members as customers but as children. This is a family that is actually better than the family that many of you have experienced. But, this way of seeing and being the church is quite different than what many tend to think. Therefore, I think that these next couple of months are going to be really sweet and fruitful.

2 John uses the word “truth” 5x and 3 John uses “truth” 7x. 2 John uses the word “love” 4x and 3 John uses “love” and “Beloved” 4x. They both use joy and rejoiced. When you tie it together

you see that the proper understanding and relationship of love and truth produces joy. John is describing a local church who have a right view of truth because they have a right view of God. This right view of God generates a deep love for God, a deep love for truth and a deep love for one another. When you taste that and experience that, you want to protect that from imposters who want to destroy it and from plastic imitations that threaten to replace it.

1. **Who are we?** (1)

A. **We are people who are loved.**

John identifies himself as the elder (v.1). The word elder can refer to a formal position of spiritual leadership in a local church. Whenever that is the case, it appears in the plural, elders. Here, it is in the singular and while it can mean an older person (which John is), John is using it in a paternal, affectionate, term of endearment kind of way. This letter is a letter of affection from a man with deep affection for the people he is writing to (as we will see in the next phrase). Imagine that John is dipping his quill into a heart-shaped inkwell, but this heart-shaped inkwell is being refilled from an infinite source. The love that John has for them and they love they know and experience ultimately comes from God. John captures this when he writes...

"The elder to the elect lady and her children." This is how Christ views the church. Remember that John is writing to a local church. This is how Christ views each of his churches. The elect lady. The lady means his bride, his wife, his treasured possession that he has married and covenanted together with to love, provide for, protect and perfect, delight in, sing over, build a home for and return for. We are not the chosen or elect because of how beautiful we are, special we are, or loveable we are. We are the elect because he chose us, came after us, died for us, called us, regenerated us, justified us, adopted us, and sealed us. He wrote his name on us. We are his because he chose to love us. But, since he loved us and we experience his love...

B. **We are people who love.**

"whom I love"

Some of you have taken in pets that were abused and you had to earn their trust. Some of you have taken in foster children who were neglected, traumatized and very suspicious and we understand. But I have been around many children who are secure in their own skin and they are relaxed with who they are and give love freely because they have received love so freely. I have said to a number of you parents, this child has been loved well. John knows the love of Christ. John is, *"the disciple whom Jesus loved"* (John 21.20) The heart of love that John has for others is continually filled with the unending love of Christ. But how is love understood and defined? *"whom I love in truth"*

C. **We are people who know the truth.**

"whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth."

Love and truth are not only compatible, they are married to one another. This is a very helpful definition and in many ways a corrective. In our western culture, love is presented as and understood as, primarily as an emotion. In fact, it is an uncontrollable and unpredictable emotion. People fall in love, like they fall into a manhole. They were walking along and BAM! it just happened. *“Neither of us were looking for it, but the chemistry between us was like magic! It was undeniable. Yea, I know that we were both married to someone else, but you couldn’t deny the electricity.”* And, if that happens, who are you to deny that person of their right to love, their right to happiness, their right to love whomever or whatever they want to love. After all, it isn’t their fault. They didn’t choose to love that person, they just fell into it and if you try to deny them of that, then you are crushing their identity, their personhood, their true and authentic self. In fact, if you deny them of what they think they love, then you are not loving, you are hateful and you need to be cut out of their life because you are not supporting them. Don’t judge me. Love is love.

That is why we have this idea that Love is Love. Love is love means that I get to love whomever I want and you can’t judge me. You cannot have any say over who I love. Ok, let’s play that out. Let’s say that your dad is 50 years old and he “falls in love” with your neighbor’s 6-year old boy. You can’t stop love, right? It just happens. He didn’t ask for this, it just happened. You cannot judge it, right? If he divorces your mom, moves out of the house, walks out of your life so that he can try to get married to a 6-year old neighbor’s boy, are you cool with that? Aren’t you supposed to support him since he has now discovered himself and is being authentic to his true person? Are the neighbors cool with that or are they intolerant bigots because they don’t support your dad’s true self? What are the neighbors to do if their 6-year old son says that he is in love with your 50-year old dad? Love is love, right? Are social services and the police cool with that? The idea that love has no definition or boundaries is absurd.

True love is defined by God. It is boundaried. It is marked by truth. Truth and love are married together in God’s family. You cannot have the one without the other. God is love and Jesus is truth. Therefore, we love in truth. The truth about God and his gospel are the lines on the sides of the road inside of which love travels. God’s love for us is rooted in God who is the God of truth and righteousness. His love is a righteous and a holy love. That is what makes it so pure. Love is defined by God’s truth. John loves this church and that is why truth matters so much to him. If the church loses the truth, it will lose genuine love.

When John says, *“whom I love in truth”* he is speaking about Christ and the gospel. Truth is the boundary that defines our love. Truth is the fence that defines what is right from what is wrong. Truth is like the fence around a playscape. It protects the children from predators so that they are free to have fun. The truth of the gospel is this: God created people in his image so that we would reflect him, love him and enjoy him. But, we rebelled against him. We sinned and each of us have gone our own way. Since God is righteous and we are sinners, our sin has to be punished. But, instead of punishing us for our rebellious treason, God sent his own Son, Jesus Christ to come to the earth and become one of us so that he could do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Jesus died as the payment for our sins. Jesus rose again as proof that the

payment he made in full was accepted in full. That is the truth. That is the gospel truth. Every person who knows this, believes this and trusts in Christ is forgiven of his/her sin, and adopted into the family of God. They are in truth. They are in the people of God. They are in the true church. The truth (the gospel) defines the arena of what is right from what is wrong. People who are in truth are people who are in the gospel and therefore, people who are in the church. We are free to love one another in truth because the truth has set us free to love.

2. Why are we the way we are? (2)

Notice that verse 2 begins with “because.” John uses “because” because a “why” question is being answered. Why do we love and why is our love defined by the truth and why is this embraced by all those who know the truth? Look at v.2.

A. **Because Christ abides in us.**

Jesus is the embodiment of the truth. Jesus is truth. Look at the relationship of v.1 to v.2. The community of believers (the church) is the result of, is created by those people who know the truth. The gospel forms the church. The gospel shapes the church. The gospel informs the church. Why are we the way we are? Why do we love truth? Because Jesus lives in us and he is truth. Why are we offended by sin? Because Jesus lives in us and he is holy and he is here to stay. Why do we care about others? Because Jesus lives in us and he cared so much for us that he died for us and he is here to stay. Why are we full of Jesus instead of full of ourselves? Because we cannot save ourselves. We are sinners who deserve God’s wrath. But, we have been rescued from our sin when we embraced and trusted in Christ for what he has done instead of trusting in ourselves. And not only is the truth of that with us, but Christ is in us. Christ abides in us by means of the Holy Spirit who reminds us that this is true of us and is true for every single person who will ever trust in Christ and Christ is here to stay. He abides in us. He is with us. Our hearts have been changed. We have a new orientation. Instead of thinking that life is all about me, we now realize that life is really about Christ. That is what the church is for. It is not here to make much of me. It is here to put Christ on display. But, the crazy thing about real love is this, the more you love, the more like Christ you become and the more like Christ you become, the more you actually find yourself. But there is more.

B. **Because Christ abides in us forever.**

Christ and his gospel are not only in us, but he abides in us forever. When you pass through the river, I will be with you. When you are in the valley, I will be with you. When you are in the valley of the shadow of death, I will be with you. Wherever you may go, if you have trusted in Jesus as your Savior, Christ abides in you, forever. Never forgotten. Never abandoned. Never alone. Christ abides in us forever.

3. What is our unshakeable hope? (3)

We are used to similar greetings in Paul's epistles that are expressed as prayers. John's expression here is slightly different and it is beautiful. Instead of expressing this as a prayer, wish or blessing, he confidently assures his readers that grace, mercy and peace will be with us. There is a wonderful relationship even synergy between grace, mercy and peace, but each of these and all of them are the result of our amazingly generous God who overwhelms his children with gifts that we do not deserve but that he loves to give anyway.

A. Grace from the Father through Jesus is with us.

Grace is God giving us what we do not deserve. This grace is from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son. Some people have a twisted view of God in that they think that the Father is the angry One and the Son is the kind, compassionate and calming One. This text is clear. God, the Father is the source of grace and the Son is the means of grace. The Father sent Christ to be the wrath-bearing, debt-paying, justice-satisfying sacrifice in our place. Jesus received what we justly should receive. The just and righteous wrath of God was satisfied in the death of Christ which unleashed God's grace to us. When you trust in Christ alone as the One who paid in full for your sins, you are forgiven. God gives us forgiveness. We don't deserve that. God declares us righteous. We don't deserve that. God redeems us. We don't deserve that. God adopts us into his family. We don't deserve that. God places us into the church. We don't deserve that. God is going to live with us forever. We don't deserve that. Grace is with us and will be with us. Because of that, so will mercy be with us.

B. Mercy from the Father through Jesus is with us.

Because genuine followers of Christ are the recipients of God's grace, we are also recipients of God's mercy. Mercy is ours and will be with us from the Father through Jesus. Mercy is NOT getting what I deserve. I deserve to be punished for my sins, but Jesus was punished for me. I do not get justice, I get mercy. I deserve to go to hell for my rebellion, but Jesus took my hell for me. I do not get justice, I get mercy. This is a reality that characterizes the kind of relationship that we have with God. We never have to fear the punishment of God for our sins. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. God does not treat us as if we owe him for forgiving us. We are certainly debtors to mercy. We know that. But, he does not hold it over our heads in a punitive way. After all, there is nothing left for us to pay. Jesus paid it all.

Proverbs 23.6-7 says, *"Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; for he is like the one who is inwardly calculating. 'Eat and drink!' he says to you, but his heart is not with you."*

God is NOT the stingy man who forgives you, but in his heart is saying, "This is going to cost you!" Because he is gracious, he is full of mercy. Grace and mercy mark our relationship with God as does peace.

C. Peace from the Father through Jesus is with us.

Peace now and forever. Can there be anything greater than your enjoyment of God with others who enjoy God who are all together being enjoyed by God?

D. All of this in truth and love.

This grace, mercy and peace are supernatural. It is from God the Father and is secured for us by Christ. That is the gospel. If a church loses the truth of the gospel and the truth of God's Word, it will lose the very source of love. That is why all of this is in truth and love.

Conclusion:

Since grace, mercy and peace are with us from God through Christ, forever, then what kind of a people are we to be? Obviously, we are to be gracious, merciful and peaceful, right? Is that what marks you? Is that what marks us? Are we a people who grasp what it means to be loved by God, to have our sins forgiven, to be guaranteed our life with him forever? Has the reality of that expanded your heart so that there is room for you to love others and consistently think about them? What would the life of a church look like that consistently took this to heart? Whatever that is, that is what we want to be. That is what 2 John is about.