

# Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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May 28, 2006  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
1 John 4:13-21  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 1:15-26  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 8  
Second Lesson: 1 John 4:13-21  
Gospel: John 17:11b-19

## Rely on God's Love

What does it mean to rely on someone? What does it mean if you are going to rely on someone to help you out in a time of need, to take care of you, to be there for you? I suppose it means that you think they are trustworthy. They are reliable. They have the desire and the ability to help you. Think of how often in life that we do rely on others. As a child, think of how you rely on your parents to meet your needs. Think of how you rely on your parents to feed you and when you are real little, to change you; to put a roof over your head; provide you with clothes. A lot of those things you just might take for granted as a child because that is just what you expect parents are there to do. But in reality, a great deal of your life is relying on your parents whether you recognize it or not.

This morning as we look at 1 John 4, we are encouraged to rely on God's love; to put our trust in God's love; to believe in God's love; to know for certain that God's love is there to take care of us; and as we consider these words from 1 John 4, we see that to rely on God's love is something we do because God's love is not up to us. It is a gift of God's Spirit. Then we also see the affect that gift has on us. It is a gift that drives out fear.

1 John speaks a great deal about God's love. We have talked about it, but it has been a few weeks. So just a reminder that love isn't the kind of love that we often talk about—the love of friendship, a physical love—that is not what God is talking about when he talks about God is love or rely on God's love. He is talking about that unconditional love that puts the interest of others ahead of your own. That is what God did for us in Christ. He put our interest ahead of his own. So this kind of love goes far beyond the kind of love that we usually experience. It is a love that we aspire to as Christians. It is one that we often fall very short of. That is why he has to talk about how love drives out fear, because our simple nature quite often is afraid to live with that kind of love.

So when he talks about this kind of love, to rely on God's love, it is something we do because we know we live in him and he in us because he has given us of his Spirit John says. The Spirit is the one who grabbed us when we were enemies of God, when we were hostile to God, when we wanted nothing to do with God, when God's Word seemed to us to be foolishness—whether that was as an infant when we were baptized or later as an adult through the preaching of the Word when he brought us to faith. He grabbed us at that point in time and worked in our hearts that we believe in Christ and that we rely on and trust the love he has for us instead of relying on ourselves. He did

this in us when we could offer nothing to him. That is why we can say God is love. He puts our interest ahead of his own. He gives us of the Spirit when we have nothing to offer to him. The Spirit lives in us. The Spirit is what connects us to God's power source—his love for us in Christ—so that we live for him.

Did you notice that if you go through the kitchen in the basement there are some wires hanging down. There is a new service box that is going to be put in down in the basement. Think about the very nature of that wiring, the wiring that is in our church. The wire is nothing in and of itself, right? It is inanimate metal. It is there and has no power in and of itself until it is hooked up to that power source and a switch is flipped. And then think about what that wire can do. It helps you to heat up some popcorn at home. You push two buttons on your microwave and before you know it you can eat hot popcorn. You can throw a frozen pizza in the oven and 14 minutes later you can come back and burn your tongue on the sauce. All that stuff you can do because that wire was connected to the power source. Unplug your oven when you get home and try to cook a pizza. See how far you get. You won't burn your tongue, I will guarantee that.

In a real sense, you and I are kind of like that wire, aren't we? If we are not connected to the power source of God's love for us in Christ, we can make a lot of noise and do various things, but we can't do anything that is really something for our Lord. Anything that is done for God and is God pleasing is out of love for God and according to his Will. If we aren't connected to God, if we are plugged from that power source, we are just lifeless, inanimate objects that shuffle through life until we leave this world. But we rely on God's love for us. We connect ourselves to his Word, to his Sacraments, and day by day we grow in that grace. We grow in that knowledge. We rely on the love God has for us. That gives us confidence because it is a gift of the Spirit. If it was something we were relying on of our own, would you have any confidence? Would you have any comfort? Would you lay your head down on your pillow at night and think, "I know I am forgiven because I have tried my best?" We wouldn't get to sleep at all, would we? If we relied on ourselves and the love that we show in response to God or we rely on anything in and of ourselves, there is nothing but doubt that Satan would pounce upon and just drive home that wedge between us and God. But we know that we live in him and him in us because he has given us of his Spirit and he continues to give us of his Spirit through the Word and through the Sacraments. We are continually plugged into that power source and we continue to grow. We continue to rejoice in the knowledge that God has wiped away our sins. We continue to rejoice that we have a God that loves us that much that he came to us when we couldn't come to him. So we rely on God's love that first of all came to us as a gift. And then we live daily rejoicing that this gift drives out fear.

This love that is brought to its goal—this perfect love or perfected love—the love that is brought to its goal is made complete or brought to its goal among us so that we can have confidence on the Day of Judgment. Perfect love drives out fear. It doesn't mean that we have to love perfectly. It means that God's love was brought to its goal. God's love was perfected in Christ and brought to us through the Spirit. And now because God is the one who has done it, it drives out fear.

Think of how hard it is for you and me to live with this unconditional love and put someone else's interest ahead of our own. Aren't we afraid somewhere in our hearts at times that if I do something for you or if I give of something that I have to help you out, there is going to be less for me? So at times I pull back. Maybe you pull back. You keep yourself from even doing what you know is right because you can rationalize away why you shouldn't show love to this person at that time. Because you need it for this or you need it for that. You don't have the time. You have to take care of this and you have to take care of that. Our sinful nature can grab on to those rationalizations and fertilize them and make them grow into strong, mighty oak trees that we will believe.

When the love of God that is perfected in us is in front of our eyes, when we focus on it and we rely on that love, the fear is driven out because we know that we have God's promise to take care of us. We know that we don't rely on ourselves. We rely on God's love. So then when that fear not only of Judgment on the Last Day is driven out, but that fear of day-to-day living—knowing that our God will take care of us and meet in our needs in Christ Jesus, he will give us what we need for body and life—when we live and rely on that love that God has shown us, then fear is driven out of our day-to-day lives also. We know we can rely on God. He loved us enough to die on a cross for us. Now he is going to leave us alone? That would make no sense. So we rely on his love, and the more we grow in it and the more we rely on it, the more fear is driven out of our daily lives.

We understand, I think, this confidence that I can stand before God's Judgment seat and I know that I am forgiven. I think we have that. We might struggle at times when we have committed some large sin, but then God comes to us and says, "All sins, whether you think they are large or small, I have taken away in Christ." And we rejoice in that forgiveness.

But it seems as though the devil at times is very successful in getting us to be afraid in some of the smaller things, the things in day-to-day life of loving perfectly other people. So I think God's answer is to focus on his love—to be connected into that power source so that we grow and that we grow and that his love flows through us to others. When this fear is driven out, then we can begin to love other people unconditionally—not holding something back but loving them as God has loved us, forgiving as we have been forgiven, showing love as God has shown love to us. We do it not because we want to earn something from God, but we do it because we want to thank God for this incredible love that he has showered on us. That is why when God gives us a command that whoever loves God must also love his brother; it is not a command that is a burden to us. It is a joy to us to love as we have been loved.

That is what we rely on. That is what we put our trust in, because the one who has loved us loves us perfectly. He has a love for us that we don't have to doubt. We know that he is reliable. We know that he has the ability to keep his promises and we know that he has the desire to keep his promises. So we joyfully hear his Word and receive his body and blood and then we joyfully depart to serve God in love.