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**April 25, 2021, Easter 4B**  
**St. Thomas Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana**

**Series: Love: the Cure for Indifference  
Remains**

**1 John 3:16-24**

*We know love by this, that Jesus Christ laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?*

*Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before God whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and God knows everything.*

*Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from God whatever we ask, because we obey the commandments and do what pleases God.*

*And this is God's commandment, that we should believe in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and love one another, just as Jesus has commanded us. All who obey God's commandments abide in God, and God abides in them. And by this we know that God abides in us, by the Spirit that God has given us.*

If you were to make a to-do list of love, what would you say your love does? Does it comfort a fallen child? Does it make up after a fight with a spouse? Does it affirm what you see in the mirror, even if someone might airbrush it out? Does it do the dishes, fold the laundry, mop up the floor? More? Our society loves the love story, the sappy romance of breathlessness and quickened pulses, but rarely is that love looks like in the long run, let alone what love looks like outside of romance. What does your love do? As Christians, beloved children of God, clothed in God's love, we are called to have an active love that mirrors God's own.

When the Elder talks about God's love in today's passage, he says God's love *abides*. The word, in Greek, is *meno*, which means abide or dwell or remain. At first, I didn't think that meant much; abiding, dwelling, remaining – God's love seems a little...boring. It doesn't seem to do much, right? These are words that seem like sitting on Grandma's front porch in an Indiana thunderstorm, watching the rain soak the cornfields. A comforting image, yes, but what about when I want the love of God to shout? When I want the love of God to roll down like thunder? When I want the love of God to fight for justice? What about when our well-laid plans crumple around us – when jobs are lost, careers are changed, beloved children or spouses die? The love of God remains. What about when cities are demolished by bombs, and children choke on toxic fumes, and governments and rulers play out their charades, with little care for human life? The love of God remains.

What about when words hurt, and friends lie, and the chemicals in one's brain are out of whack? The love of God remains.

Yes, the love of God remains. In her book *The Ordering of Love*, Madeline L'Engle has a lovely poem called "The Birth of Love." It reads:

To learn to love  
is to be stripped of all love  
until you are wholly without love  
because  
until you have gone  
naked and afraid  
into this cold dark place  
where all love is taken from you  
you will not know  
that you are wholly within love.

When we are stripped of what matters to us, of what we believe makes us lovable, when we no longer have on our side health, or wealth, or stability. When friends abandon us, and family is far. When what we once trusted reveals itself to be untrue, and when the institutions we believed in crumble, then God's love remains.

If this is true, beloved, how, then, shall we love? The Elder says we should love not in word or speech, but in truth in action. When we say God's love remains, this is the kind of love that bears witness to the world around it. It isn't a passive bystander kind of love, but the kind of love present exactly when and where it hurts. I was taken by the New York Times's coverage of the Derek Chauvin trial, the editors showcased a piece about the teenager who changed the whole case, a young woman named Darnella Frazer who turned on her phone and taped the death of George Floyd, providing a counter to what could have been the "official record." That, it seems to me, is this kind of love: she remained there bearing witness to what would happen to this stranger, united only by the color of their skin and being in this place, at this time. Would we, too, remain?

Frederick Buechner writes about love in this way,

The love for equals is a human thing—of friend for friend, brother for brother. It is to love what is loving and lovely. The world smiles.

The love for the less fortunate is a beautiful thing—the love for those who suffer, for those who are poor, the sick, the failures, the unlovely. This is compassion, and it touches the heart of the world.

The love for the more fortunate is a rare thing—to love those who succeed where we fail, to rejoice without envy with those who rejoice, the love of the poor for the rich, of the dispossessed for those who seem to possess all. The world is always bewildered by its saints.

And then there is the love for the enemy—love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain. The tortured's love for the torturer. This is God's love. It conquers the world.

Beloved, let us remain with one another, as God remains with us. Let us remain in love with our families and friends, that our love for them may deepen and broaden and withstand the challenges that lie before us. Let us remain in love with our leaders that whether we agree or disagree, we may work together toward a more just and equitable world. Let us remain in love with those who are impoverished, that we might provide for their needs and hear their deepest desires. Let us remain in love with those who are marginalized, those society considers less-than, that we make stand in solidarity with them, and amplify their calls for equity. Let us remain in love with our enemies, that, perhaps, in loving them, we ourselves might change and our love might take the same of the love of God that remains with us.

Amen.