

**John, Apostle & Evangelist**  
Pastor Ed Harkey

Revelation 1:5b-6  
TLC, Keene, NH

**[OPENING SLIDE]**

**THE HEROES [aka Saints] OF THE SEASON:**  
*Love Down ... Love Out*

*“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come ... Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.... Amen.”*

*“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

**Introduction**

**[SLIDE #2]** There is a commercial airing on TV – for some insurance company, I believe – that highlights the various words for love in the Greek language. This catalogue of words is probably old news to many of us, but to review ... the four loves are *στοργη*, *φιλια*, *ερος* and *αγαπη*. Translated, they relate to familial love, to the love between friends, love that is sexual in nature, and “love as an action,” says the ad.

But the problem is that the ad completely skirts the biblical connection to *αγαπη*. For when the Holy Spirit sought to capture the essence of such a love as God had for the world – “*so that He gave His one and only Son*” – there really was no word for it. Yes, *αγαπη* did exist, but its usage outside the New Testament was almost non-existent, with examples few and far between. (TDNT, 1:37) **[SLIDE #3]** All to say that when God needed a Word to communicate His unconditional love for us, He basically had to invent one. He did, the perfect embodiment of which is Jesus!

On this 2<sup>nd</sup> day of Christmas (yes, it is still Christmas), let us rejoice in these latter days, that such love has come down to us.

Where, “Everything owes its existence to the love of God,” said Julian of Norwich (*Revelations of Divine Love*). And John – “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” – seeks to bring us to it. As one bearing witness solely to Christ, He brings us to:

[SLIDE #4]

LOVE DOWN ... LOVE OUT!

Amen.

+++

LOVE comes DOWN ...

Where, on this 2<sup>nd</sup> Day of Christmas, we receive the gift of “two turtle doves” and ... John, the disciple “*whom Jesus loved.*” (John 13:23; 19:26)

What *do* we know? He was the brother of James ... a son of Zebedee and Salome. Like his father and brother, he was a fisherman ... one of the twelve, who with Peter and James formed Christ’s inner circle ... a “Son of Thunder” ... the only one who did not abandon Jesus at the cross ... entrusted with the care of Jesus’ mother ... [SLIDE #5] settling in Ephesus (whose tomb in Turkey you can still purportedly see).

He is an apostle and evangelist ... leaving a literary legacy of three letters, a Revelation, and a Gospel ... often associated with the symbol of an eagle ... soaring “above the clouds and above the stars,” says Augustine, above angels and every creature, arriving “at the Word through which all things were made.” (*Sermon 253.5*)

John did not die ... a martyr’s death, anyway, which is why the colors of the day are white (not red) ... (Though Augustine relates a legend that he supervised the building of his own sepulcher, whereupon its completion, he laid down in it, and was buried alive ... where at the resurrection, he will burst forth just as he was laid to rest.). In his later years, he was exiled for a time ... until his death, which brought to an end the age of the apostles.  
(Adapted from Weedon, *Celebrating the Saints*, 238-239)

[SLIDE #6] John’s LOVE for His Savior went OUT ...

Where, for all we know of him, one fact arises: He loved Jesus ... with all of his heart ... undivided ... exclusive. His literary legacy is priceless. Where, “in his faithfulness to Jesus he found the meaning of his life.” (Fernandez, *In Conversation with God*, 1:228)

LOVE DOWN ... LOVE OUT

[SLIDE #7] Which is what happens when LOVE come DOWN ... when He shines the bright beam of the Gospel on them ... when fills them with new wine – and not the cheap stuff (John 2) ... when He brings them to Himself in the waters of Holy Baptism (John 3) ... when He assures them with His Word of forgiveness (no matter how many husbands or wives they may have had) (John 4) ... when He places into our mouths the very bread of life. (John 6) When LOVE comes DOWN, things change. We change ... when the Lord comes to us, and bids us to walk with Him on the road of redemption. Yes, we change ... as do the lives of those around us. And all because of ... God's love!

It is this love that not only gives meaning to the other loves of our life – the familial, friendly, and yes, even the erotic, but it is the love of God in Jesus that redeems them. Like the love of family, the love of friends, and the love of a husband and wife expressed in a more intimate ways ... they are all gifts of God.

[SLIDE #8] OUT with LOVE ...

Though, admittedly, it appears “we’re all out of love.” In fact, if these last months have revealed anything about this world, it is how quickly selfishness is revealed in us, where worldly attitudes seep in, and Satan is all the ready to exploit them.

Like the ones captured in these anecdotes I read recently:

Friend to Wife: “Do you think your husband is hard to please?”

Wife: “I really don’t know—I’ve never tried.”

Husband to wife as he turns on the first Dolphin football game of the year: “Is there anything you need to say before the season starts?”

Or this one, at Christmas dinner, just days ago, where one wife was heard to have said, “Who wants to carve the turkey?”

To which her father said, “You carve him, you married him.”

All is not well ... wherein, once again, with but a simple cataloguing of the various types of love, a lengthy list of abuses and trail of brokenness can be seen ... familial, friendly, erotic – and that was before a pandemic that drove us inwards.

Yes, just take stock of your own life ... where have you been? Where are you now with regards to the various relations? How has a lack of love have strained your friendships, your relations with family, perhaps even your brothers and sisters in Christ?

So often, in our desire to be first or to put our actions above other's, we demonstrate, at times, how selfish we can be ... and how quickly Satan would exploit the cracks in those relations, and worse, possibly bring them to a swift and not-so-silent end.

**[SLIDE #9]** But then ... LOVE came DOWN. Not in some sentimental way, but love out of labor, literally, amidst the smell of dung and beasts ... divine mercy borne out of a heavenly Father's heart and will. Jacques Leclercq, puts it like this: at Christmas, he says, "Everything inside me stops. I am face to face with Him; there is nothing but this Child in the whole of that huge white expanse. He does not say anything, but He is there ... He is God loving me." (*A Year in the Liturgy*)

Yes, thanks be to God for the love He speaks into our midst. Where, in light of the times we so often muck it up, He proves His greater love for us, "*while we were yet sinners.*" (Romans 5:8) Yes, it is our sin that made *αγαπη* – love of such a sacrificial and unconditional variety – necessary. Christ's love for us ... borne in a manger, coming to full bloom when He died on the cross for our sins ... love going the distance ... and back again ... restoring us, and the relationships in our lives.

**[SLIDE #10]** Yes, God's *αγαπη* [LOVE] going OUT: Unconditionally articulated in His Word of forgiveness ... unqualified, as it is communicated in water and the Word that brings us into His life ... Unrestricted, when conveyed by means of an invitation to His Feast ... Unreserved, as expressed in the "mutual conversation and consolation" we enjoy as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Where, you don't just invite anyone into your inner circle. You don't let just anyone rest their head on your shoulder at the most important meal of your life. You don't entrust the care of your own mother to just anyone.

Why not? For the LOVE that still comes DOWN. Of which John knew, firsthand ... the love of Calvary raining down upon him at the foot of the cross. Love in real time. Seeing not only his own sin, but the sin of every other witness that day ... nailed to a cross. That's what the love of God in Christ does. It not only redeems us, it redeems our relationships. It creates the fellowship we have with one another, whereby, "*the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*" (1 John 1:7)

**[SLIDE #11]** LOVE DOWN goes OUT ...

Where, during the scene, just prior to our Lord's conversation with Peter in our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus appears on the shore as His disciples are back to fishing. It was then, that "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" recognized Him, relating it to Peter. Where, Peter leaps into the water to swim ashore. Says one commentator, "With a love like John's and a faith like Peter's, what is there than can stop us?" (St J. Escriva, in Fernandez, 230)

"*It is the Lord!*" Such is John's cry of love, flowing from Jesus' love for him, extended to Peter, and to us all.

**[SLIDE #12]** What expression might that love take in us? What gratitude might you express to God for His love in Christ? Leading to what act of kindness? What tangible expression of care? What word of appreciation or encouragement? Might it be some quality time with your husband or your wife again? Might it be more intentionality in cultivating a friendship – new or old? Might it be to reach out to one of your brothers or sisters in Christ whom you haven't seen ... to write, to call or to visit them?

**[SLIDE #13]**

LOVE DOWN ... LOVE OUT

## Conclusion

[NOT SURE IF I'LL USE THIS ☺] Peppermint Patti to Charlie Brown, as they were lounging one day under a tree: "Tell me what love is, Chuck." Charlie Brown: "Well, years ago, my dad owned a black, 1934, two-door sedan ..."

Patti suddenly interrupts him: "What's that got to do with love?"

Charlie Brown: "Well, this is what he told me ... there was this real cute girl, see ... she used to go for rides with him in his car, and whenever he called for her he would always hold open the car door for her ... after she had got in and closed the door, he'd walk around the back of the car to the driver's side but before he could get there, she would reach over and press the button down, locking him out ... then she would just sit there and wrinkle her nose and grin at him ... that's what I think love is ..."

Patti: "Sometimes, I wonder about you, Chuck." Charlie Brown: "Sigh!"

[SLIDE #14] Peppermint Patti to Charlie Brown under that same tree: "Tell me what love is, Chuck."

Charlie Brown: "It's a man called Jesus!"

Wherein, it is purported that, in the twilight of his age, when old and feeble, John would ask to be carried to worship, whereupon each of those occasions he would say: "*Little children, love one another!*" Asked once why he always said this, and only this, his answer was: "It is the command of the Lord, *and if only this were done, it would be enough.*" (Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians 3:6*)

It would be ... but cannot be, unless LOVE comes DOWN first. Child of God, it has. Jesus has, "*full of grace and truth.*"

Bringing forgiveness, in abundant measure. Something John knew, first hand. We, do too! In the same abundance.

Why? Because that is who God is ... that is what God does ... of who He is and what He does for us in Christ. And because He is, we, by His grace are.

[SLIDE #15]

LOVE DOWN ... LOVE OUT.

*Amen.*