

## LOVE FIRST: 2012 Summer Messages from 1 John

July 15: “Love Makes Peace” I John 3:11-20: Peace and love go hand in hand every day in every way.

Intro: Before I can talk about peace I have to ask myself, “Do I have peace? Can I talk honestly about peace if I myself am overwrought, fearful, and anxious?”

The answer is YES, I can talk about peace with you. In order to do it honestly I have to tell you that I often lack peace. I get anxious and afraid. This is my confession to you.

But I am not telling you today about my experience of peace. I am declaring the word of God to you that works for every person in this room. My imperfections in regard to peace are no reason to hesitate in this discussion. Even though I am a fellow struggler I can bring the truth to you.

In fact, I often preach messages feeling inadequate in my own performance. The word of God convicts me just like it convicts you. I do not and cannot preach from the pinnacle of perfection. I always preach from the street where I live in Sometimes Land—sometimes doing well and sometimes doing poorly.

I know this: love makes peace. Jesus made peace for those far and near, and he did it through a startling and climactic act of love and an amazing life of love. He made this peace even as he was executed by the Roman authorities and hated by the Jewish leaders. The turmoil and tumult of his final hours as a man on this planet seem to belie the idea that he made peace.

But he did. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet,” Paul the Apostle said (16:20). How is the violent picture of crushing Satan with your feet related to the God of peace? Peace is not the absence of conflict or trouble. It is the presence of purpose, progress, and fulfillment.

### I. We Passed from Death to Life

A. BEING: Do Not Be Like Cain. That is easy to say. We are not to be a certain way—not to BE.

1. Trying to be like someone is a common human impulse. You can find articles out there on the web about being like Bella from the Twilight series: 10 ways to be like Bella.

2. Who do you want to be like? Do you have a hero, a role model? Is that role model worthy of your emulation? “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” Do they deserve the accolades of your imitation?

B. Belonging: Cain belonged to the evil one.

1. John is very clear about this as was Jesus. You are either a child of God or a child of the devil. Cain was the latter. He belonged to the evil one.

2. Cain’s “actions were evil.” In this way also he belonged to the evil one. He was emulating the father of lies and deceit and murder.

C. Love=Life; No love=death. “Anyone who does not love remains in death.”

1. How do you feel in the presence of death? \*\*\*Last week a man talked to me about going to help when Flight 759 went down in Kenner. And he could not do it. He had to leave. The very sight and smell of that terrible scene made him violently ill.

2. Death is decay. Death is stench. Death is darkness, alienation, and separation.

\*\*\*We live in a city where death is prominent. Our cemeteries startle visitors. We are worshipping here beside “the most visible cemetery in America”—Greenwood Cemetery. The dead have a heightened presence in our flat landscape because they are buried above the ground in mausoleums and crypts.

\*\*\*Decadence Festival celebrates decay. “Decadence” itself has the word “decay” in it and refers to “the condition of a civilization in decline,” “the process of decline or decay in a society.” This tossing aside of all inhibitions, this immoral self-indulgence, is part of the culture of death in our city.

\*\*\*I conducted a wedding at St. Elizabeth’s House when Anne Rice still owned it. She hosted us that day. I walked in the front door, was shown a door to the right, and was greeted inside by a four-foot-tall vampire doll standing in a coffin. Surely the idea of the “living dead” arises from the fear and reality of death itself.

The vampires and voodoo, the flesh markets and the political corruption, the racism and the bigotry, the drugs and the violence all have this in common—they are part of a culture of death.

3. “Remains in death.” You and I live in danger of accepting this deadly condition of our culture as natural and inevitable. There is a kind of death that we can “remain in.” We can live in it, breathe it, and abide in it. Just as we are told to remain in Christ, we can do the opposite and remain in death.

4. What would that look like? Death is the place where there is no love. “Anyone who does not love remains in death.”

D. LOVE ALONE HAS THE POWER to end the culture of death and bring us back into life. Nothing else will do it. And it must be a startling, amazing, and life-changing love.

So has anyone seen a love this powerful?

## **II. We Know What Love Is.**

A. We know what love is. This is all we know of love. This is what we know of the greatest love in this world. This is sacred knowledge, life-changing.

B. “This is HOW we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us”—v16.

1. We know this powerful love not because we are great philosophers or even great lovers. We know this only because it has been once and forever demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus our Lord.

2. We came to know this love when Jesus laid down his life for us. The laying down of his life was the act of love. This stands in total contrast with CAIN who took down Abel out of anger and hatred. Jesus did not take down someone else. He went down himself. In this world so messed up someone is going down. Only one king can stand on the mountain. The culture of death says step on the little people until you get to the top. The culture of life says lay down your life.

C. This laying down of his life was “for us.” It was PERSONAL. He did it for me. He did it for you. We are the ones in need. We had no way to solve our own sin problem. He laid down his life for us. LOVE IS PERSONAL. It is intimate. It is hands-on, one-on-one, real and face to face.

D. This is PEACE-MAKING, this going down, laying down of your life. If Jesus did this, we are to follow him and do it also.

1. You say, “Well, I don’t want to be a doormat.” Okay, I understand. And there are times when you must stand up for yourself. But *they wiped their feet on Jesus, and if you go down someone is likely to wipe his feet on you*. When you go down, they will think they have won. They will act as if they have won. They will shake hands, stomp their feet, and cheer.

2. Until the power of LOVE brings you right back up again, back on your feet, in your place. Laying your life down does not mean that you stay there. It means that your life is transformed from what can be defeated to what is indestructible. When you rise back to your feet, you have won the battle with hate and fear and anger, and you never struck a blow. All those jeers and cheers and sneers are exposed for what they are—death with make up. And you give the wake up that stirs that dead man from his sleep.

## **III. We Set Our Hearts at Rest:** *This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence (v19).*

A. The love that lays down its life is the love that brings peace and rest, calms the heart. You realize now that it is not dog eat dog for you. That is not your life. Your life is love, pure and simple.

B. Material possessions are often a great source of conflict. Set in the perspective of love they are tools for addressing need. The Apostle mentions material possessions for two reasons:

1. Everyone has them, and they can possess us.

2. Everyone needs them, and they can help us.

C. Jesus was radically free of the tyranny of things. He intends for you to be free from that tyranny as well.

D. Your generosity should always be an act of love. You must love as you give. You follow Christ and become more like him as you give to meet the needs of others.

E. LOVE GETS PRACTICAL. “Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (v18). We cannot escape this hands-on, face-to-face nature of love. You cannot do this and remain at a distance. You must gather for direction and strength, and then you must go to the need.

F. PEACE IS THE OUTCOME OF PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW OF LOVE. This not only makes peace with the violent man who wants to do you wrong. It not only makes peace with the angry woman who plasters you with her ugliness every. It makes peace with God. It puts us “at rest in his presence” which is precisely where and how we want to be.

Conclusion: