

"Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." 1 St. John 3.13

A concept that we hear about more and more is this word, "hate". We hear of "hate crimes", we hear of acts of violence being committed against groups of people because somebody "hates" them. We also hear this word quite a bit in our day-to-day lives. Somebody says they "hate" pickled herrings, somebody else might say they "hate" meat, or "hate" running long distances. This word, "hate", really seems to be all around us. We seem to be living in a world full of "hate". Even children learn this word at a fairly young age – it's seemingly everywhere – and sometimes it gets used against members of the child's family. I can distinctly remember when I was a child (admittedly not that long ago), my grandmother would have given me a smack if I said I hated something, let alone a member of my family. Of course, she grew up during the Great Depression and the Second World War, so she knew that family was the rock that would always be there for you.

So why do I bring this up? Well turn with me in your prayer books to page 220, and see the Epistle for today (3:13-24). The opening line we have before us are "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." Why is St. John talking about hate, though? Let me give you a bit of context from earlier in this chapter. St. John has been talking about how sin is lawlessness (3:4), and how those people who make a *practice* of sinning are of the devil (3:8). Jesus came to earth to destroy the work of the devil (3:8), and "whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother" (3:10). And this is where we start to approach our reading for today; I'm starting two verses ahead at verse 11: "¹¹ For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. ¹² We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (3:11-15, ESV). So, St. John tells us, hate is murder, and no murderer has eternal life.

Now, stay with me: this isn't the cheerful news I'll be leaving you with today, this is just the opening number. But it starts to make sense why I was never allowed to say the word "hate" as a child, doesn't it? Hate is evil. Hating something – *fully* hating something – is as good as murder. Now, of course, saying that I *hate* smelly fish is not actually murdering that poor smelly fish because it's already dead. But what does trivializing that word, "hate", do to our souls? I would say it desensitizes us to the ever-creeping presence of evil. It makes us too comfortable with the idea and doesn't sound that bad. This is just the kind of sneaking and creeping of evil that is enough to infiltrate our lives – and infiltrate it has! A child doesn't know what meaning the word "hate" truly conveys if they are allowed to say it willy-nilly. Maybe we don't even realize it, having grown up with the word in our vocabularies. I can tell you that I have been actively trying to purge it from my repertoire for words that better convey my *dislike* for something. For dislike and hate are vastly different things.

As we hear every week in the comfortable words from St. Paul: “this is a true saying...that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”,¹ and then from St. John reminding us that if we *do* sin (which we all do and will continue to do), Jesus is our “Advocate with the Father” and the “propitiation” for our sins: which is the satisfaction, or the one who makes us right with God.² Everything that God has made is good. Even if we contort God’s creation to do evil things, there is not anything made of God that is not good. The opening chapters of Genesis tell us so. And, in the collect we heard all through the season of Lent, “Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made...”³ If God doesn’t hate us for the evil that we have done and continue to do, neither should we hate anything that God has made – for God loves us.

Thus, St. John tells us in our Epistle today, we know what love is because Jesus laid down his life for us. God is love, he tells us in the next chapter (4:8), and so Jesus’s death is the ultimate example (or prototype) of love. So rather than murder somebody by hating them, love means we must be willing to die for others. That’s a *really* significant sacrifice. Can you really, truly, conceptualize what it feels like to be willing to die for someone. I like to think I could do that, but if the moment really presented itself, I’m sure I would still hesitate.

St. John goes further to explain this. To simply think that we love one another is not enough: there must be action (3:17). Sure, we don’t always have to lay down our lives to prove that we love somebody, but there are tangible things we can do. Those who *have* good, and see people who have need, but do nothing: where is the love of God?, asks St. John. Christians are called to be sacrificial, in remembrance of the one who sacrificed all for us on the cross. This is one of the reasons there is so much attention being given to the projects undertaken here at St. Mary’s. There are problems in our society: creation is changing due to human’s greed and neglect, people are going hungry because they can’t afford the increasing price of food, and drugs are running rampant through the streets. These are just a few examples. Sure, we can’t change it all with a stroke of a pen on a cheque, but there are concrete things that we can do: the Food Forest is just one small example of that.

St. John tells us that this is the commandment from the Father: “that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment” (3:23). Those are the two main tenets of Christianity. Here we are today, loving Christ. But what else? What are the needs of our community that we can meet? What can we provide? These are some of the questions I hope to plant in your heads for the next many months. By keeping your ear to the ground, you can share in my Diaconal ministry that Fr. Kevin has been describing in the bulletin columns. What can we do to help those who live where we’re at? Please do let me know what you come up with.

Just a few short weeks ago, on Pentecost, we remembered the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. St. John reminds us that this Spirit lives in us and reminds us whose we are: “Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us” (3:24). So, let us be empowered by the Spirit to carry out our duty in this place, and further the mission of love and not the mission of hate.

¹ 1 Timothy 1:15, as quoted in *the Book of Common Prayer*, 78.

² 1 John 2:1-2, as quoted in *BCP*, 78.

^{3,4} Collect for Ash Wednesday, *BCP*, 138.