

*Based on 1 John 4:7.*

*Beloved, you should love.*

Don't forget the most important thing, we say to our children at the end of First Pew every Sunday: *God loves you! And so do we ...*

We hope it sinks in. That it really, truly, sticks in their soul. So that when all the lies of un-loved-ness they will inevitably receive in this world tell them the exact opposite, those lies will simply slide off the backs of our children - and ourselves - like so much water down the drain.

That has not been the case for the community of John's Letter. The lies of un-loved-ness have settled in a bit too deep, stoking painful resentments over doctrine and spirituality and justice and just plain how to live together in love. The lies of un-loved-ness have led some people to leave the community altogether. Others have stayed but wonder what new form the community will take.

Into the heartbreak of un-loved-ness comes the most important thing. *Don't forget*, John's Letter says. *YOU are Beloved.*

It feels good when we say it, when John's Letter says it, like a tuning fork drawing us back to our true frequency, like a deep peace permeating head to heart that carries us through good times and bad.

It feels like freedom when we say it, when John's Letter says it, like all of the shackles that bind up our Belovedness suddenly springing open and simply falling away.

Nothing really matters but Love, when we say it, when John's Letter says it. *Beloved*. The word wraps us up, enfolds us, celebrates us. *Beloved IS* us.

We could stop there and simply be *Beloved*. That would be good enough. That is, already, good enough.

But John's Letter continues.

*Beloved*, John's Letter says, *You should ...*

Which gets my hackles up already. I knew it was too good to be true! Belovedness is conditional, the lies are the truth. We have to do something to earn the Belovedness, there it is right there, John's Letter *should*-ing all over us!

But no, this is simply the context of Belovedness, John's Letter says, which is *communal*. In fact, the Greek for this Lesson is a mere two words, both of which are plural: *agapētoi agapōmen*. Meaning *all y'all Beloved should be loving all y'all*.

It turns out Belovedness is not an isolated event for just you [insert your name here] or just me, even though Belovedness is, indeed, emphatically for you [insert your name here] and for me. It turns out Belovedness is only truly known, as my predecessor used to say, in true communion with God and true community with one another. Belovedness is, by its very nature, John's Letter is saying, *reciprocal*.

And that is just plain hard, at least for me, especially when we have to learn that the one we really do not like is also Beloved. Which means that even when we find ourselves offended by - or even hurt by - what the other is doing or saying or believing, they also are Beloved, treasured, cherished, a special gift.

If we are truly Beloved and they are truly Beloved, and we find ourselves in conflict, the only question John's Letter allows us to ask is, *What Would Beloved Do?* And the only answer John's Letter allows us is, *Love*.

Which is good I suppose, if that means we can just hunker down and *think happy thoughts* toward those with whom we disagree. Except, for John's Letter, that is not enough. For John's Letter, not even words or speech, not even telling the other they are Beloved is enough. John's Letter insists that true Beloveds Love in truth and in action. Which, if we read closely, means breaking bread together - yes, with the ones we find hard to love! It means sharing what we have with one another - yes, with the ones we find hard to love! It means even giving our very lives for one another - yes, for the ones we find hard to love!

I just plain don't want to do that!

Which is, it turns out, the point of John's Letter.

*Belovedness*, John's Letter says, is an insistence that the way things are is not the way they always need to be. That the hurts we harbor and the pain we perpetuate are not the final answer but can instead become a path to the compassionate heart of the Divine.

*Belovedness*, John's Letter says, is really hard work. It is a daily choice, a practice, if you will, that begins with God and flows through us, like Lake Trout finding her way home in a Lake Trout reunion, as great cold waves heave and crash around us and among us.

*Belovedness*, John's Letter says, is a promise that this work will be worth it. That, as we have been saying through Advent, *the dark is not an end. It's a door. It's the way a new creation comes*.

One final note before that new creation comes in its fullness, which is to point out this week's Pastor Error in our bulletin. It turns out yours truly can mistranslate even only two words of Greek, which is emphatically *not* my true love but rather the arranged marriage the PC(USA) forced me into in order to become a Pastor.

Instead of saying *Beloved, you should love*, as is printed in our bulletin, John's Letter says, *Beloved, WE should love*.

Which may be the most important point of all.

The author of John's Letter comes to his community - and to us - in humility, as well as hope. I, too, need to remember the most important thing, the author of John's Letter is saying. I, too, long to let go of the lie of my un-loved-ness ... and yours.

When it comes to *Beloved Loving*, the author of John's Letter is saying, there really is no you and me ... or us and them ... or even just *them* - those *other people* whom we have been trying so hard to love.

When it comes to *Beloved Loving*, the author of John's Letter is saying, there really is *just us*.