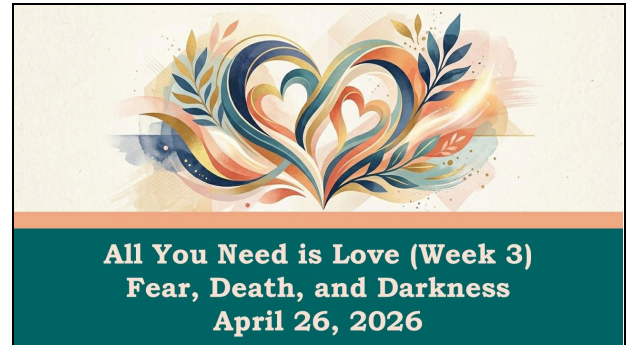


All You Need Is Love (Week 3) - Fear, Death, and Darkness

### Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. It's a good bet that your deepest wounds are from being unloved. Could be from your family of origin, which are injuries that can last or influence a lifetime. Could be a friendship that was lost. Could be a betrayal that left you vulnerable and ashamed. As on and on the list could go.



2. The accumulation of these wounds make us, as Dr. Jonice Webb (psychologist) puts it, into "waterless wells." We live in perpetual thirst for love and yet in time give up believing that we'll get it. Renowned Christian counselor John Townsend in his book *Hiding From Love* describes the wide ripple effects of these wounds on us: a) we begin to label emotional needs as weak or immature or bad, b) we develop other ways of coping with our lack of love, often unhealthy, such as anger/temper, self-righteousness, addiction, and c) we lose any clear sense of self because love from others is a crucial ingredient to self-understanding.

3. Similarly, many of our lingering regrets in life stem from lovelessness, or more particularly, not loving others well or from withholding love. Multiple studies of those nearing the end of their earthly life reveal that we tend to have two kinds of regrets as we near death: "ideal regrets" (where life didn't live up to our ideal, such as we didn't take a risk we should have, or we didn't follow our dream) and "relational regrets" (in which we failed to love the people we should have, often because we focused on other things instead, such as career).

4. The "love letter" of the New Testament, 1st John, has three major sections in its five chapters that talk about the cost of lovelessness, and each one uses a different word picture. First, in [1st John 4.17-18](#), we can observe along with Robert O'Neil, presiding bishop of the Episcopal churches in Colorado, that, "It is a simple, straightforward, and often neglected fact: The opposite of love is fear. For fear is the breeding ground — the simmering cauldron so to speak — of all the resentments, bitterness, anger, and destructive behaviors that constitute and give rise to hate. It doesn't matter whether our negativity targets others or is turned inward in a form of self-loathing. Thus, beneath every other imagined enemy to love is its real foe - fear."

5. We can often tell who loves us the most in our lives by the absence of fear: we can relax around these people, we can express half-baked thoughts, we can share our emotions, etc. But it's also true that many of the wounds we carry are from people who we thought would love us well but instead made us afraid - they made us fear their criticism, or what they'd say about us to other people, or that they cut off the relationship entirely. Sadly, we live in a world whose relationships are far more often driven by this kind of relational fear than love. And surely a regret we might have is that we have made others feel that same fear of criticism or judgment from us, instead of love.

6. In [1st John 3.11-15](#), the writer of 1st John contrasts love with hate. While at first glance, most of us would think that we don't hate anyone, we might reconsider when we dig into the nuances of the Greek term for "hate." It carries several layers of meaning: a) it is to demean someone or think yourself (your experience, your thoughts, etc.) as far superior to someone else, b) it means to renounce someone, as in, it's your excuse for no longer caring about what's best for the other person, and c) it means to dehumanize someone, that is, to view them as less fully human than yourself. All that being said, most of us might now admit that we do in fact hate from time to time, even if it only occurs in our inner monologue between our ears.

7. And 1st John 3.11-15 says that hate as described above kills. It is tantamount to murder. It is death to both the carrier of the hate and the target of the hate. Psychologists call it the "dual injury paradigm": love withheld hurts both the one not loving by numbing them emotionally and causing them to be stagnate, and the one who is unloved by making them feel invisible, struggle to trust, and live perpetually unsatisfied.

8. So lovelessness is both fear and death. 1st John 2.9-11 would add a third image to the mix - it is darkness. Judith Lieu, a professor of divinity at Cambridge, writes about these verses, "To be in darkness, rare in our modern world with its ever present artificial light, is to experience blindness, to be disoriented without any sense of direction, to be bewildered and lack understanding...But this experience of darkness is not merely confusion. The darkness of not loving also creates blindness, it is an active force rendering us incapable of seeing God's light and love."

9. St. Augustine of Hippo (300s CE) once said, "Love, and do what you will." Meaning, in any choice or circumstance we face, we will have a good sense of what to do that's best if we seek to do what's loving. 1st John 2.9-11 is saying that the opposite is also true: if we aren't willing to love first and foremost, then we're guaranteed to stumble around in the dark and eventually fall flat on our face. To not give or receive love is ensure one's own moral, emotional, and spiritual blindness.

10. Fear, hate that leads to mutually-assured death, and darkness - this is the cost of not being loved and of being unloving. This is why psychologist Sue Johnson says that lovelessness is not about trivial emotions, but is in fact a "survival threat." The absence of love is an illness that slowly makes us less and less human; the presence of love - giving and receiving it - heals us.