

1 John 3:18-24

There is an old saying which goes, “The **proof** of the **pudding** is in the **eating**.” What that actually means is that when it comes to **pudding** - no matter what kind of a **cook** you are, no matter what kind of **ingredients** you use, and no matter how fantastically **smooth** and **creamy** your pudding may look on the **outside** - when it comes to **pudding** you really can’t tell what it **tastes** like until you **eat** it. The **proof** of the **pudding** is in the **eating**. A **similar** axiom can be applied to those people who call themselves **Christians**. No matter what they **look** like on the outside, or what kind of a **family** they come from - just because a person **says** he is a loving Christian, doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s **true**. The proof of a person’s **Christianity** is in the way he **lives** his **life**. **The Proof Of Christian Loving Is In The Living.**

I don’t know how many of you regularly read the **funny** pages in the newspaper, but I used to check them out pretty frequently. The “**funnies**” actually give a pretty good reflection of the things which are going on in the world around us. For example, I remember seeing one comic strip in which a teenage girl was bemoaning the fact that her family had to **move** to a new town, and in the process she had to leave her **boyfriend** behind. Her mother made the remark, “She doesn't even know what love **is**.” But more significantly, the **neighbor** lady answered with the comment, “Does **anyone**?” There’s a lot of **truth** to that. Love is an **abstract** idea - it’s an **emotion** - it’s one of those **intangible** things which is very **difficult** to figure out. Sometimes when you can’t explain something in **words**, you can get your point across by using an **example** - and that’s what God does in our **text** today. He gives us an example of **love**. Just before our text today God tells us, “*This is how we have come to know **love**: Jesus laid down His **life** for us.*”

The **proof** of Jesus’ **love** was in His **life**. Jesus **proved** His love for every sinner by laying down that **life** for us. It’s difficult for us to recognize the **enormity** of that action because we are born in **sin**. As we look around ourselves and see the different **kinds** of love in the world - love between **husbands** and **wives** - love between **parents** and **children** - even love between **brothers** and **sisters** in the **faith** - we have to see that even the **finest** earthly examples of love are all **tainted** by sin. Mere human beings are **incapable** of giving us an example of **real** love - of **perfect** love. But since Jesus is true God **and** true man, He can show us what **real** love is supposed to be like - and He **does**. The perfect **love** of Jesus begins with His perfect **life**. **The Proof Of Christian Loving Is In The Living.**

Again, none of us has ever **experienced** a perfect life - nor **can** we. As John began this letter he wrote, *“If we say we have **no sin**, we **deceive** ourselves, and the truth is not **in** us ... If we say we have **not sinned**, we make him out to be a **liar**, and his **Word** is not **in** us.”* Again and again God tells us in His Word that we have **sinned**, that we have fallen **short** of what He demands, and that we will receive **death** as the **wages** for our sin. But it’s **different** with Jesus. He **hasn’t** sinned - He **hasn’t** fallen short - He **doesn’t** deserve **death**. Yet, He laid down His **life** for us by His own **choice** and without being **coerced**, in order to bring us **peace**.

That was Jesus’ **reason** for coming to this earth, as He Himself said, *“A **thief** comes only to **steal** and **kill** and **destroy**. I came that they may have **life** and have it **abundantly**.”* You know, we often talk about people having a **full** and **happy** life. But an important fact to keep in mind is that such a life is only **possible** through **Jesus**. There’s **no way** a person can have a full and happy life if they’re constantly burdened with the guilt of their **sins** in this present life. And there’s **no way** a person can have a full and happy life if they continually feel the threat of eternal **damnation** in hell hanging over their heads. But that’s the beauty of **Jesus**. He came to **pay** for those sins in **full**, thus **removing** from our lives all the **guilt** for them, and all the **punishment** for them.

Probably the most **remarkable** thing about this action on His part was that Jesus didn’t expect anything in **return**. When was the last time you **freely** and **willingly** gave up something of great **value**, without **expecting** something in **return**? That’s not normally the way **we** operate. Ordinarily we might use large blocks of **time** or large sums of **money** as **investments** - not only fully expecting to get back our **principal**, but also expecting to receive **interest** on it. Now compare that with **Jesus**. The Bible says, *“For at the appointed time, while **we** were still **helpless**, Christ died for the **ungodly**. It is rare indeed that someone will die for a **righteous** person. Perhaps someone might actually go so far as to die for a person who has been **good** to him. But God shows his own love for **us** in **this**: While we were still **sinner**s, Christ died for us.”* We were **powerless**, **ungodly**, and still **sinner**s - totally **unlovable** and totally unable to **return** the favor. Yet, Jesus didn’t just give up a few hours a **day**, or even a few thousand dollars a **year** for us. He gave up **everything**. He **died** for us. Jesus proved His love for **all** people by **living** for us, and by **dying** for us. **The Proof Of Christian Loving Is In The Living.**

Dear friends, that total **selflessness** and **devotion**, without expecting anything in **return**, is God's example of **perfect love** - an example which He wants **us** to try and **follow**. Jesus said, "*A **new commandment** I give you: **Love one another**. Just as **I** have loved **you**, so also **you** are to love **one another**. By this everyone will know that you are my **disciples**, if you have **love** for one another.*" Christians **prove** their love for fellow sinners by **living** for them. How? Our text gives us the answer to that **too**. "*Whoever has **worldly wealth** and sees his brother in **need** but closes his heart **against** him - how can God's love **remain** in him? Dear children, let us love not only with **word** or with our **tongue**, but also in **action** and **truth**.*" Here again we have the example of **Jesus** to follow. When He encountered people who were **hungry** or **thirsty** - He **fed** them and gave them **water**. When He found people who were **sick** or **diseased** - He **healed** them and made them **whole**. Jesus met the **physical needs** of each individual, and by **doing** so, He made them more **receptive** to the idea of having their **spiritual needs** met by Him as well. Because Jesus had already been a **friend** to them in times of **physical** need, they **trusted** Him. So later on, when they were in need of **spiritual** help from God's Word, they came to **Jesus** - their trusted **Friend**. Here's a little phrase which we would all do well to remember. "People don't **care** how much you **know**, until they **know** how much you **care**!"

Let's take just a minute to apply that to **ourselves** here at Trinity. We have all kinds of opportunities to show people how much we **care**. Every month we highlight a specific **mission** to support. Some of them are **close** by, while others are **far** away. Some of them involve the ministry of our **Wisconsin Synod**, while others are more **community** oriented. Giving from our resources to **support** them is one small way of **showing** them that we are concerned about their **physical** and **spiritual** needs.

Our new Mission of the Month for the month of **May** is **Luther Prep School** - one of the high schools which is owned and operated by **us**, as members of the Wisconsin Synod. Remember, it's not just the **physical** blessing of a good **education** which is at stake here. But rather, it's also the **spiritual** blessings which these young people will **become** in the future, as they **serve** the LORD in His Church as pastors and teachers, as mothers and fathers, and as people who are **equipped** to carry out all the tasks which the LORD brings into their lives. The **Proof Of Christian Loving Is In The Living**. Dear friends, use your time, talents, and treasure to **live** and **love** as true disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ - all for the praise and glory of **His** name. Amen.