**Series: #Life Together**

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

1 John 4:7-12

January 5-6, 2013

**“The Key to Healthy Relationships”**

I have a confession to make—I find the church too often a lonely place, and I think a number of you would say the same

-we come in longing for something that is all too absent in a lot of American, suburban, large churches

*-as well as small, urban ones*

-COMMUNITY—but not just any community—*community as defined in Scripture!*

-there are moments when something of the communal happens in churches

-a loving response to a crisis that shows what the church is capable of

-a missional endeavor that calls us to mobilize—and reveals Christ’s dynamic presence amongst us

-but they are too infrequent—which can be explained by a number of things

1. our own propensity to be independent—which is intensified by our northwest culture—OUR REFUSAL TO JOIN
2. by our bigness—it’s easy to sneak in and sneak out
3. but mainly—our unawareness of—or disobedience to—what Scripture calls us to be as *the body of Christ*

-this is what I want to explore for the next few weeks

-looking at twelve “one anothers”—statements in Scripture that serve as *the mainframe for community*

-twelve “*mutuality demands*” (stir up, encourage, bear up, forgive one another, etc)

-without them—we are free form, a random gathering, a non-impacting club

-with them—we can become a radical, life giving community

-years ago, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor during Hitler’s reign in Germany created an underground seminary—in which true community, biblical fellowship was essential to survival

-among his books was *Life Together*—which for many has become essential food for those hungering for the real life of fellowship

-it is full of statements like the following—

*“It is easily forgotten that the gathering of Christ followers is a gift of grace that any day may be taken from us…therefore, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients”—Bonhoeffer*

-a needed contrast from “I go to this church because I like their music—it meets my needs—I like the worship center”

-so I am borrowing from his title for this series— #Life Together

-I’ve placed the hash tag in hopes that these “one anothers” will hopefully start a conversation

-more than this—start a life change

-the logical start point—the most important “one another” is *love one another*

-it is the foundational substratum—the relational act par excellence in Scripture

-and no one addressed this as passionately as John—both in his gospel and his letters

-love was at the center of John’s moral vision

-in his first letter, addressed to an unidentified community having a *torturous time* loving one another

-he refers to love 46 times in the space of five chapters—underscoring that at the forefront of their failure was the unwillingness to get along

-the central passage is *I John 4:7-12—(read)*

-John’s language is terse, to the point, black and white

*-no wiggle room for these saints who were not getting along*

-here are five things you need to know about love—

1. *LOVE’S DEMAND—*this is where the passage begins
   1. -the imperative means it is not an option—it is the requirement of the gospel

-the non-negotiable obligation of the household of faith

-Jesus summed up the entire law in this one command

-Paul identified love as the one thing we owe one another

-Calvin once wrote—faith without love is like the sun without heat—without love—nothing else matters

* 1. “one another” tells us there are no boundaries to love

-love is everybody’s business—“*it is the ocean we are all called to swim”*

* 1. the present tense tells us the demand is continuous—it is never a finished product

But some of us might immediately push back

-it’s hard to love “fault filled humans”

-I’ve tried it a lot—and the people I’ve tried it on aren’t so good at it either

-we remain distrustful—even fearful—for to love is to become vulnerable

Illustration—a time with Ken—difficult to win

-love is risky—it is hard to love someone who has hurt you

-it takes energy and effort we may not be interested in expending—*it may not be there in us*

-here’s the second thing we need to know about love—

1. *LOVE’S BASIS—read verses 7-8*

-it’s here John grounds his exhortation—removes our excuses—here’s why we are expected to live out love—

* 1. Love is Inherent in God

-it is what defines God—it is who He is

-His love has no beginning nor end; no impurities, no limits

-we cannot grasp it—only point to it—which John does here—to make his second point

* 1. Love is Inherited from God

-meaning that in salvation something mysterious, supernatural happened

-this love—His love is now in our DNA

-in Christ—we can no longer claim that we have no love

-God has infused us with His love

-a love that is lavished—“poured out”, free flowing—Romans 5:5

-“God’s love is like the Amazon River flowing down to water one daisy”—FB Meyer

-hence—in coming to Christ—coming to know God—we are soaked with a new capacity to love

-so that a refusal to love calls into question someone’s claim to be in Christ—this is John’s point in verse 8

*point-loving people and knowing God are components of one inseparable whole*

-if one does not love others—one is a stranger to God

-a liar actually—people full of hot air (2:4)

*-like claiming parents in whom there is no resemblance*

-John leaves no loopholes—lovelessness=godlessness—this is the basis for love

But what does it mean to love? What kind of love defines us as followers of Jesus?

*“There is no other word in our society more messed up, misunderstood, perverted, and misused as the word ‘love’.”—Peterson*

-this is the third thing John wants us to know about love

1. *LOVE’S DEFINITION—read verses 9-10*

-John again goes back to his reference point—it is God—not us—who shows us what love is

* 1. Love is an ACTION—verse 9

-He has “revealed”—meaning—

-love is not merely something God is—an “ontological” statement about God’s essential being

-love is not something abstract—an idea, a concept, an attitude, a state of being, a collection of passive feelings

* 1. Love is an UNCONDITIONAL ACT—verse 10a

-God’s love is not prompted by us

-it is spontaneous, uncaused, undeserved—while we were yet sinners—at our

ugliest, in our failure—He loves—Romans 5:8

* 1. Love is a SACRIFICIAL ACT—verse 10b

-God’s love is generous—an offering—something of significant cost

*-the cross is the crowning proof of God’s boundless love*

-a love that enables us to have life (verse 9b)

*-a love that enables us to love*

-and now John makes his application—the fourth thing about love—

1. *LOVE’S OBLIGATION—read vs 11*

-it’s simple logic John uses—if God loves us like this, how could we do anything less?

-no one who has been to the cross and seen God’s love can go back to loveless living—-so—like God—

1. loving one another must also be concrete action

-something more than mere sentiment, intent

1. loving one another does not wait for someone to initiate—is not conditioned by what the person has done or who the person is
2. loving one another is willing to pay the price of time, of resources—willing to sacrifice our comforts, our circle, our pride

-loving one another in the body of Christ is not always convenient—can demand a lot of patience

-it is walking in to worship prepared to expend my spiritual gifts where needed—in order that others might have life

-it is getting up earlier to pray for the needs of one another

-it is welcoming someone I have never met

-it is giving my resources to the whole—rather than dictating where God’s money should go

-it is listening when I would rather be on my way

-it is singing songs that are not always my preference—mentoring the next generation and putting up with their mistakes

-it is reaching out to the single dad—the barren woman—the person who is dealing with a medical complication or mental deficiency

-it is expecting the best—rather than assuming the worst in someone

-it is committed to one’s success

-it is giving no ear to gossip—saying thank you

*-love is a selfless act—an offering of my life for another*

-John has given his exhortation, removed our excuses, defined God’s love and applied it to us

-but there is one more thing about love—

1. *LOVE’S REWARD*—*read verse 12*

-if we follow through with this one another—and that is a big “if” (3rd class—we may or may not)—something radical will happen—

1. People will see God

-will walk in and become aware of Christ’s dynamic presence

-sense God is here—indwelling—in house—in us—verse 12a

*-for love makes God visible*

*“By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”—John 13:35*

-but here’s what is more astounding—

1. People will see love brought to completion

-accomplished, finished—like something aged and brought to perfection—12b

-what God demonstrated in Jesus—that was so compelling, so profound, so overpowering

-will be even more overwhelming when love is fleshed out in and through the body of Christ—the church

-this is the potential we have—think about it!!!

-love as God intended at its highest peak

CONCLUSION

We need to stop giving people excuses for dissing the church, leaving the church

-“I am into spirituality—just not the church”

-we need to become the kind of community people are desperate for

-and we can—if we are willing to receive John’s words

-when we love as God calls us to love—there is no community on earth that can rival this community

*-when we don’t love as God calls us to love—there is no community on earth that can do so much damage*

ONE ANOTHER CHURCHWORK ASSIGNMENT

*I want you to identify one tangible expression of love one another*

*-maybe God has been speaking through this text—and you already know what He is calling you to do*

*-if it is from Him—it will stretch you*

1. *right now—write it down*
2. *identify one person you will ask to hold you accountable*
3. *expand this to your LG—start a dialogue*

*-next week I am going to ask—have you done this*