INTRODUCTION (SLIDE 1)
Welcome & Greeting
Good morning, brothers and sisters in Christ. If you are visiting us here at Maranatha this morning, we are glad to have you with us. We hope that God speaks to you during your time with us this morning and we hope that you feel warmly welcomed. My name is Tony Nord and I am Pastor for Youth & Families here. I am excited for the privilege to preach this morning from God’s Word as Pastor Cody is away.

Introduce the Subject
Having spent a few months reflecting on the character of our great God, Pastor Cody has been taking us through a series of sermons recently that focus on how the cross ought to shape our lives. In response to what God has done for us through Christ, how should our lives be different? Today, we have the opportunity to reflect on how God’s love for us connects to our love for one another.

Transition & Engagement of Younger Audience
Throughout the summer months, we have Sunday School for children ages 2-5 during 2nd service, but the older children and youth are encouraged to join their families in the worship service. To help me this morning as I preach, I would like to ask all the children who are 5th grade or younger to stand up and raise your hand for a moment. I would like to know where you are sitting and tell you that I am happy to see you here with your families. I think it is so important for families to be able to worship together at times so we can all learn together. Children, some of what I am going to say this morning is more for your parents, but much of what I say is for you as well. I encourage you to listen and see what God wants to teach you this morning. Children, I want to begin by telling you a story. I tell the story with you in mind, but if your parents listen closely, they might learn something too.

Arouse Interest
Imagine with me a story about a boy named Brian. It begins as a sad story. Brian was 8 years old. Sadly, Brian did not grow up in a loving home. His parents constantly fought with each other, yelling and saying mean things. They often ignored Brian and sometimes he had to find his own food to eat in the fridge. It seemed like the only time Brian got attention from his mom and dad was when he did naughty things like yell and scream or hit others or steal or break things. Brian was regularly told awful things about his value and worth from his parents. He was told that he made their life really difficult. He was told that he wasn’t good at anything and always made mistakes. His parents were often disappointed in Brian. He was even told by his parents, who should have loved him the most, that they never wanted children and he was an accident. Can you imagine how Brian must have felt? Over time, Brian began to believe things that weren’t true about himself. He began to believe that nobody loved him. He believed that he was a mistake. He believed that he was worthless. He was sad and, at times, he was angry. He started to be mean to others because that is what he learned from his mom and dad. At other times, Brian cried himself to sleep at night wishing that someone would just love him.

One day, Brian’s grandpa and grandma decided to pay for him to go to a Bible camp that they heard exciting things about. They hoped Brian would learn about real love at Bible camp. Brian was a little scared to go to camp with a bunch of kids he didn’t know, but he was also excited. At Bible camp, his
life changed forever! Brian learned that even though his parents did not love him, there was someone who did love him. Someone who loved him so much that you can’t even measure it. This person showed Brian how much he loved him by allowing his own son to suffer and even die so that Brian could live. This person was God. As Brian listened to the camp speaker talk about how great God’s love was for him and how God created him to be in a relationship with him, but that relationship was broken by sin, Brian began to desire to know this person called God. Brian wanted to be loved. Brian wanted to be accepted. He listened more and learned that God sent his son Jesus to suffer and die in Brian’s place because Brian’s sins had to be paid for. As Brian listened, he began to understand how great God’s love for him was. During that week at Bible camp, Brian’s life changed because he turned away from his own sins, prayed to receive God’s forgiveness, and surrendered his life to God. Brian embraced the great love of God and it changed him! He no longer had a desire to be mean to others. He no longer felt worthless and unwanted. He knew God loved him and he felt loved. He knew that God chose him and adopted him as his son and this knowledge radically changed Brian’s life. Brian began to be more loving to others in his life, even his parents because for the first time in his life, Brian knew and understood that he was loved, not just by anybody, but by the very God who created the entire world.

Make it Personal
In this story, Brian experienced something that some of you in this room have also experienced – the lavish love of God. Others of you may identify with Brian’s feelings of being unlovable. Perhaps you grew up in a home not that different from Brian’s. Perhaps you are married to someone that constantly tells you things that make you feel unlovable. And you have begun to believe the lie. If we are honest, I think all of us would admit that we have a deep longing and desire to be loved and accepted.

State the Fallen Condition Focus
The problem for many of us is that we believe God loves us in our head, but have a hard time truly accepting and embracing God’s love in our heart. We understand God’s love in theory, but not in practice. We have not experienced the love of God at the depths of our souls where it takes root and permanently transforms us and compels us to love one another.

Bond to Scripture
The relationship between God’s love for us and our love for one another is the focus of John’s writing in 1 John 4:7-21. The Apostle John who wrote this letter has been referred to as the Apostle of Love. I don’t think the moniker was bestowed on him because he had a TV show offering relationship advice like Dr. Phil. He wasn’t the “love doctor”. Rather, John experienced the love of Christ intimately as one of Jesus’ closest disciples and experiencing God’s love radically transformed his life. Love is a theme that John artistically weaves through his NT writings.

Transition
Children, the main message from 1 John 4:7-21 is simple. So simple, that even your teenage brother or sister can understand it. And if your parents listen really carefully, they might catch it as well. John’s message is this:

Attach the Proposition  (SLIDE 2)
Understanding and experiencing (embracing) God’s great love compels us to radically love one another.

Provide Organizational Sentence  (SLIDE 3)
As we look through 1 John 4:7-21, we will reflect on two sides of love: God’s love for us and our love for one another.
MAIN POINTS

Transition
If you have your Bibles with you this morning, please turn to the book of 1 John. If you are newer to the Bible, it is near the end of the Bible, just a few books before Revelation. As you are turning there, I invite the youth that will be reading the Scripture for us and praying for us to come up. Any chance I have, I like to provide additional opportunities for some of our awesome youth from the Soul Garage to be involved in our Sunday morning worship service. So this morning we have Cecily Lindner/Katie Cox that will be reading the Scripture from 1 John 4:7-21.

Scripture Reading (SLIDE 4 – multiple slides of Scripture text)
1 John 4:7-21

Prayer

Main Point 1
The first side of love we are going to reflect on this morning is God’s side. The point John reminds us of in 1 John 4:7-21 is this simple, but life changing truth: God Loves Us. (SLIDE 5)

Validation
John’s letters are like a beautifully composed symphony with different themes upon which he builds variations. God’s great love for us is one of the main themes that is woven through the letter of 1 John because this theme was woven through the very fabric of the Apostle John’s life. His life was marked by the love he experienced being among Jesus’ inner circle of disciples. Throughout this section of 1 John, the theme of God’s love is prominent. It occurs in verses 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21. John knew that understanding God’s great love for us is foundational to experiencing a transformed life.

Explanation
In verse 7, John writes that “love comes from God”.

In verse 8 he writes that “God is love”.

In verses 9-10, John explains how God showed his love to us through sending his Son into the world so that we might live through him. He defines love not based on our love for God, but on God’s love for us.

In verse 16, we see that God’s love can be known and relied upon. There are many things in life that we rely upon and end up getting let down. We bought something a few weeks ago and ended up not needing it so my wife Michelle went to return it this past week and found out that item could not be returned after a certain number of days, even with a receipt. We were relying upon the store to have a reasonable return policy and we were let down. Sometimes we rely on people and we get disappointed. There are many things and many people in life that we simply cannot rely upon. But the love God has for us is not one of those things. The love God has for us is dependable and constant. It never changes. It never ceases. God loves you and you can count on that. When all else falls apart in your life, you can know God’s love and count on it to be there for you.

Again in verse 16, John equates God with love, saying, “God is love.” Love is not just one of the character traits of God. Love is not just something that God exhibits from time to time when he feels loving. God is the ultimate definition of love. God not only defines love by sending His one and only Son to suffer and die for you and for me. God defines love by who He is.
In verse 18, John continues to address the first side of love: God’s love for us. He writes about the connection between love and fear. John makes it clear that the two are mutually exclusive. Love and fear cannot coexist. “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.” When you know and experience and embrace the love God has for you, there is nothing to fear. In Romans 8:31, Paul writes, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Are you free from fear? Has the love of God in your life driven away your fears?

In verses 19 and following, John teaches that God’s love comes first. God does NOT love us in response to anything we do. God does NOT love us because we first loved Him. Rather, it’s the opposite. God loves us because God chooses to love us. God loves us simply because He wants to.

Illustration
Michelle and I met during our time at Wheaton College in Wheaton, IL which is a western suburb of Chicago. The college chaplain during our years at Wheaton was Chaplain Stephen Kellough, (SLIDE 6) also known affectionately as Chappy K. On August 1st, 2014, Chappy K concluded 25 years of service as the Chaplain at Wheaton College. I read an article in the Wheaton Magazine last fall where Chappy K identified what he believed to be the biggest challenge facing students today. What do you think it was? Perhaps the biggest challenge facing students today is finding a job after college, or paying off student loan debt, or finding a Christian spouse, or deep friendships amidst the sometimes shallow connections in our social media age. It wasn’t any of these. (SLIDE 7) Chappy K said “The biggest challenge facing students today is knowing that they’re loved by God….There is a huge need to embrace the love of God – to know and to believe and have confidence that God loves you and is for you.”

When I read that, I thought it was quite amazing. How crazy is it that one of the simplest concepts – one that is taught in the earliest years in Sunday School is identified as the greatest need for college students: to know and believe, truly believe, that God loves you.

Illustration of Embracing
As we reflect on this simple, yet potentially transforming truth that God loves us, we must realize that it is more than just understanding the concept intellectually, it requires embracing God’s love personally. What does it mean to embrace God’s love? Let me try to paint a picture of this concept of embracing. Our daughter, Layla, is two years old. Even though she can be our neatest eater, there are certain foods that have a way of finding their way into her hair and all over her face and hands and clothes. There have been times when she was in this condition when I arrived home from work. Excited to see me, she gets down from her high chair and runs toward me, arms out, smiling and shouting “Daddy! Daddy!”.

What do you do if you find yourself in this situation? If you are like me, you gently stiff-arm your baby girl and say, “Let’s get you cleaned up first, then Daddy will give you a big hug.” Sometimes we feel that is how it is with God – He tells us to get cleaned up and then he will accept us. Thankfully, God is not like me. God embraces us with arms wide open. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8. God is much like the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son who was waiting and watching for his son to come home and when he saw him in the distance, he ran to him and embraced him. He didn’t care that he was covered in pig poop. Our God is a God who embraces us in our depravity, in our sinfulness, in the mess we have made of our lives and tells us he loves us and accepts us and wants to rescue us. He doesn’t make us take a shower first or take off our barn clothes. He wraps his arms around us and kisses our head and looks on us with joy and pleasure and says, “Son, I love you. I love you. I love you.” “Daughter, I love you. I love you. I love you.”
The other aspect of embracing has to do with whether or not we accept God’s offer of love. Some of us are too proud. Some of us don’t think we really need the help. We are independent and think we are going to take care of things ourselves. God’s standing there with arms wide open, ready to forgive us, but we stiff arm God and keep him at a distance, unwilling to humbly accept the one thing that has the most power to change our lives for good – God’s great love!

Application
How many of you have sung the song “Jesus loves me”? How many of you believe, I mean truly believe the words of that song? In the quiet of your own house, in the stillness of the night when the busyness of the daily grind has faded into the background and it’s just you and the reality of who you truly are standing before the Almighty Creator, do you believe down to the deepest part of your soul that God is crazy about you, that he is proud of you and that he delights in you? I’ll be honest, this is not an easy one for me. I struggle to believe this truth. I find myself believing it in my mind, saying “Yes, I know the Bible says it’s true.” But this truth does not easily sink down into my heart and soul to the place where I believe it truly has transforming power.

Sometimes we are too quick to focus our efforts on loving one another more. We work harder to love others more when, the real focus ought to be on understanding and embracing the lavish love of God. For when we truly understand and receive and embrace God’s love for us, fully aware of who we are and what we have done, we are changed. It is out of the healing that comes from being loved that love begins to naturally flow to others. It no longer requires so much effort, but rather an abiding in the love and presence of God.

(SLIDE 8)

Do you believe that God loves you?
Do you understand how GREAT his love is for you?
Have you embraced His great love and personally experienced it?

Transition (Address specific people in the congregation, if possible) (SLIDE 9)
Children, Youth, Adults, know this and believe it and embrace it: GOD LOVES YOU! God loves you. God loves you. God loves you. This is the Gospel message. This is truly Good News.

Main Point 2 (SLIDE 10)
The first side of love is God’s love for us. The second side of love is our love for one another. These two sides of love are directly connected. Because God Loves Us, We Love One Another. This is the second main point: LOVE ONE ANOTHER! John moves from a truth statement (God loves you) to a command (Love one another). Let us allow our understanding of God’s great love compel us to greater love for one another.

Validation
This second side of love shows up in various parts of the text in 1 John 4:7-21

Verse 7 begins with a call to love one another. John writes, “Dear friends, let us love one another.” For John the connection is clear – his call to love one another is rooted in the understanding that love comes from God.

In verse 11, John writes, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”
In verse 12 John also tells us that we can make God known to others by the way we love one another. Have you ever thought about that? John acknowledges that no one has ever seen God, but we have the power to make the invisible, visible. How? By loving one another. When we love one another (at least in the manner John envisioned), people outside the Church should notice. Non-Christians should see our love for one another and be drawn to God through our love. The question is whether or not this is happening at Maranatha? Are we known in Rice Lake and Barron County as a church that radically loves one another? Is our love for one another so deep and visible that people in the community catch a glimpse of God through us?

Again in verses 19-21, John addresses this second side of love. We are able to love one another in this radical, countercultural way, because we have first understood and experienced and embraced the great love of God. John says, “We love because he first loved us.”

As John continues, he takes his gloves off and holds back no punches. Like a boxing match that becomes personal, John addresses an issue that is an issue we still struggle with today. Listen and follow along as I read verses 20-21.

“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

**Explanation**

John uses some pretty strong language. He is making the point that it is impossible to have hatred for someone else while claiming to love God. It just doesn’t work that way. But, isn’t that how it is for many of us. We come together Sunday mornings and sing songs and smile and “worship” God telling him how much we love him while we wish evil upon the guy who cheated us on a deal or while we are verbally or physically abusive to family members or while we foster hatred to those who have wronged us. John says that it can’t be this way. If we have hatred toward others in our lives, we have never truly experienced the love of God because God’s love transforms us from the inside and results in loving others.

I think that sometimes we feel that loving one another is the hard part. But, if we have truly understood and embraced the love of God, love for one another will come naturally. It will be the natural result of a proper understanding and a full embrace of God’s great love.

This does not mean that loving others will always be easy, but when we understand and embrace the love of God for ourselves, we realize that the source of love for others doesn’t come from within ourselves, but it is an overflow of God’s love for us. When we find ourselves struggling to love others, rather than “work harder at loving” them, we should question our own understanding of God’s love.

Orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy. In other words, right thinking leads to right living. This is what Pastor Cody has been talking about. The Gospel does not just change the way we think; it changes the way we live.

**Illustration** *(SLIDE 11)*

Chaplain Kellough was also quoted as saying something just slightly different than the earlier quote I read. He said, “I have observed that there is one issue that students – and all people – struggle with above all others: God loves you. When we understand this intellectually, and when we embrace it emotionally, it will allow us to do what God calls us to do: to love God with all our hearts.” And I think
the Apostle John would add that it will allow us to love not only God with all our heart, but one another as well.

I want to encourage you as a church body to know that you are part of a church family that does truly love one another in many ways. I want to give you several examples I have experienced or witnessed in the 3 ½ years my family has been part of this church body.

1. Our basement
2. Moving to the area
3. Meals during times of need
4. Free childcare (I can’t reveal names or others of you might hit them up)
5. Helping others with house repairs
6. Helping those in need with utility bills or paying off debt
7. People giving generously to support children & youth attending conferences and Bible camp
8. Youth encouraging and praying for others that are grieving or struggling.
9. Helping hands group helping people move
10. Under Pastor Paul’s leadership, I know there are numerous small groups where men, women, couples, and even entire families are growing together

This is just a start and I have only been here 3 ½ years.

If we had an open mic time with the entire church and we invited all of you to share stories of how others in this church family have expressed the radical love of God to you and your family, I think we could probably be here for a week straight.

And by no means is this saying we are perfect as a church. I think many of us have done or said things that have deeply wounded one another over the years.

Perhaps becoming the most loving church in Barron County depends less on us trying harder and depends more on our proper understanding and full acceptance of God’s love for us individually and corporately.

**Application (SLIDE 12)**

So how does this apply to us?
What does it look like to love one another?
What do you think the Apostle John had in mind?
What did the love between the early disciples look like?

Some Christians are satisfied to show up Sunday morning, stand and sing, sit and listen, eat a donut and go home. I would suggest that if you find yourself in that camp and have not plugged in more deeply, you have not had the opportunity to taste and experience the radical love of God in this body of believers. God wants more of you than that. He wants all of your life.

The book of Acts helps us answer these questions. I don’t have it on the screen, but if you want to flip over quickly to the book of Acts and take a look at one of my favorite passages to reflect on when I dream about what it would take to be a church that clearly displays God to it’s community. Look with me at Acts 2:42-47:

“They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs...”
were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Being a church that radically loves one another as an overflow of the love of God in our lives requires a number of things that we often lack as a church:

1. **Vulnerability.** In our relationships with one another, we like to talk about “safe” things like the weather and activities and events and sports – okay, maybe talking about sports isn’t a safe thing. But in reality, we don’t like to be vulnerable with each other. If we ask someone how they are doing and they actually begin to tell us how they are really doing, sharing their deep burdens, we might as well just tell them “Whoa! Easy, killer! I didn’t really want to know that much. I was just being polite. Keep your baggage to yourself. We can be Facebook friends and vent about our troubles there, but let’s not be too real with our struggles when we see each other face to face.”

2. **Time.** We are busy. We pack our schedules too full. We don’t really have time to do life together and deeply engage with one another to push past the surface level relationship and dive deep into each other’s lives. This is a huge struggle for me. I love relationships and often feel I don’t have the time to engage as deeply with as many people as I would wish to connect with.

3. **Closeness.** We like fences and attached garages and distance between ourselves and others. We hang out with others when it’s convenient or when we are forced to, but we like to have our castles to retreat to in order to keep a safe distance. We sometimes lack the type of closeness that is required to be a church that radically loves one another.

4. **Dependency.** There is a strong sense of independence in this culture. Some of it comes from the American individualism historically. Some of it is probably a Midwestern thing. Perhaps some of it is Scandanavian. I don’t know for sure, but at times, I am convinced some of it is simply sinfulness. We are the Church. We are the Body of Christ with various members all working together to make up the whole. In the New Testament, there is a strong emphasis on unity and oneness and interdependency within the Body of Christ.

5. **Trust.** Do you trust those sitting around you? Some of you are thinking right now that you don’t even know the names of those sitting around you. You wouldn’t even trust them to hold your coffee cup while you use the restroom. Trust is the foundation upon which relationships are built. It is the glue that holds relationships and groups together.

It is difficult to trust and depend on people you don’t know. It is difficult to get to know people you keep at a distance. It is difficult to get to know people that you don’t spend quality time with. And even people who are close to each other and spend time together will not radically love one another if they do not learn to be vulnerable with each other.

Here are a few practical thoughts on how we can radically love one another.

1. **Small Groups:** If you aren’t already, get plugged into a small group or start a new one. Talk to Pastor Paul. If you are in one, keep pressing deeper and deeper into each other’s lives. Do life together. Get to know each other and learn to trust each other more deeply each week. Spend time together. Wrestle through Scripture together. Hold each other accountable and help each other grow. Confront each other in love when you sin. Rejoice and celebrate when good things happen in one of the group member’s life. Cry together and grieve when there is loss. Spend time in each other’s homes. Stop stiff-arming each other and learn to embrace one another with the love of God in a radical way. When you hurt and wound each other in the messiness of being
in community, be quick to forgive and reconcile. In loving one another radically, you will make God visible to those around you and they will want to know what is different about your group. They will be drawn to Christ through you.

2. **Master Your Calendar**: Someone in seminary once said, “If you don’t master your calendar, your calendar will master you.” We are busy people – often busy doing good things, but often too busy to do the best things. Do you have space in your life or are you running so fast with all your activities and commitments that your family never sits down for a meal together and you never get to know your neighbors to express the love of Christ to them? Are you too busy to use the spiritual gifts God has given you to lead a small group or serve in Sunday School or be trained to be a future Elder at Maranatha?

3. **Pray**: Pray for yourself and for your family to truly know and embrace the love of God and allow it to transform you from the deepest part of who you are. Pray for our church to become more and more loving. Pray together with your family for the prayer needs in your circle of influence and look for opportunities to practically express the love of Christ to others.

**CONCLUSION**

**Recapitulation**

In our text today, John helped us reflect on the two sides of love: God’s love for us and our love for one another. The two sides are intimately connected and the first comes before the second. We must first understand and embrace the love of God. When we do this, it changes us from the inside out. This personal experience with the unconditional love of God compels us to love one another. Not in a shallow donut conversation, but in a radical way that requires vulnerability, time together, closeness, mutual dependency and trust.

People of God, remember this simple truth: GOD LOVES YOU! And allow that truth to sink down from your mind into your heart and cause you to move your hands toward those around you in a radical, counter-cultural love.

(SLIDE 13)

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God!

*Closing Worship Set*

**BENEDICTION**

People loved by God, receive these good words from Ephesians 3: “I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 

18 may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 

19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” Amen.

Have a great week!