

Nineteen-year-old Mary Sullivan had just moved from Cape Cod to Boston, where she rented an apartment in the bustling Beacon Hill neighborhood. Within a few days of her arrival in January 1964, she was found dead. Her attacker raped her and strangled her to death. Sullivan was one of 11 women whom Albert DeSalvo — known as the Boston Strangler — would later confess to killing. However, he then recanted, leaving lingering doubts about the possibility that the real assailant had eluded capture. DeSalvo was never convicted of any of the Strangler killings, but he was sentenced to life in prison on other rape charges. Fellow inmates stabbed him to death in 1973.

*In July 2013 DeSalvo's body was exhumed so they could conduct a confirmatory test using a DNA sample directly from DeSalvo. DNA extracted from a femur and three teeth yielded a match — specifically, DNA specialists calculated the odds that a white male other than DeSalvo contributed the crime scene evidence at one in 220 billion — leaving no doubt that DeSalvo had raped and murdered Mary Sullivan.*

*DNA is used by law abiding citizens like you and me.* Our daughter a few years back gave us an Ancestry.com gift for Christmas. We had to take some of our spit, and send it in. A bit gross. A few months later, I discovered that most of my roots lie in Germany. My wife, whose maiden name is Fredrickson, discovered she was Scandinavian and German. How about you? Are you descended from anyone famous? There's a good chance of that if you are from mainland Asia including the southern part of Siberia. According to a 2003 study, 16 million men or 8% of the male population from that area are descended from the feared Mongol ruler, Genghis Khan. If you double that figure to include women, close to one out of every six people living between the Black Sea and the Pacific Ocean today may be able to claim the Mongol warlord as their forefather! Genghis Khan not only conquered a vast empire in the 1200's, he apparently also populated it!

What kind of person would you be if you were descended from Genghis Khan? A skilled horseman? A ruthless warrior? A talented organizer? We may not have any descendants from Genghis Khan here to answer that question but a study of our past would no doubt reveal some famous and infamous forefathers. Today we're going to inspect our spiritual DNA. In so doing we'll learn that we're more like the world's first murderer Cain than we would like to admit. But we'll also see that as believers in Jesus we're more like Christ than we perhaps realize.

Scientists have identified certain genes that can lead to cancer. This should help us take better care of ourselves. For example if you carry the gene that can lead to skin cancer, you dare not forget to put on sunscreen when you spend a day at the beach. Better yet, stay out of the sun as much as you can.

Are there any such weaknesses in our spiritual DNA? There certainly are. We've inherited Adam and Eve's knack for rebelling against God. The Apostle John explains just how bad things are when he writes: "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous... 15 Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him" (1 John 3:11, 12, 15).

Not only are we like Adam and Eve, we're like their son Cain, the world's first murderer! "Come on, Pastor. John is exaggerating!" If only that was the case. The truth is we're more like Cain than we'd like to admit. What caused Cain to bludgeon to death his brother Abel? John tells us. Cain started out with being irritated at his brother. Abel always did things the right way. Then he was envious of his brother that God accepted Abel's offering but not his. That envy led

to resenting his brother, anger with his brother, which exploded into hatred and then bloodshed. But Cain had done away with his brother before he took his first swing at him, for hatred is nothing other than wishing that the other person didn't exist.

With that definition in mind, how many times when you were married have you actually murdered your spouse? Think of when they did something that got your goat. You had it with them. For a moment you just wish they were out of your life. How about if you had children. Did your son or daughter do something totally disgusting? Did you just kinda wish they weren't part of your family at the time? Or what about the times when they were small and you let out a sigh of exasperation when you bent down to pick up their toys and clothes again? Work is an especially homicidal place isn't it? Lazy co-workers. Inept managers. It's great that there's an app for your smartphone now that allows you to pelt your co-workers and managers with imaginary pies and other, less savory objects. Think of how many people today, actually hate our president. They want him gone, out of the way, they wish he didn't exist. I find myself at times wishing certain progressive thinkers did not exist, that they would just disappear. That may sound hilarious but John checks our laughter when he writes: "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him" (1 John 3:15). Have we been kidding ourselves? Do we honestly think that we can continue to bear that grudge and look down on "those kind of people" and still be welcomed into heaven? Don't bet on it, says John.

Instead of hating we're to love one another. Notice how John doesn't qualify those words. He doesn't tell us to love those who are nice to us. He simply says to love one another. Love every person that you meet whether they are deserving of your love or not. Be patient, kind, caring, not ever easily angered with them. Jesus demonstrated that kind of love John said: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16).

Can you imagine giving up your spot in line at the Emergency Room so that someone with a lesser wound or ailment can be treated first? You might do that for a baby who needs a few stitches even though you require dozens of stitches because of a car accident. But if you were bleeding to death, would you let someone with a paper cut butt in line? No. "Me first!" you'd cry. Jesus too cried, "Me first!" but it was the shout of one who distracts the bear so that he doesn't attack the other hikers. Jesus' shout was answered when God poured out his full wrath on him for the world's sins. That wrath has now been spent like a storm cloud dumping all its water in one burst so that the dark skies are replaced with blue, and cold wind gives way to warm sunshine. Those who know and believe this will show love to others explains John. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death" (1 John 3:14). Just as a sick person doesn't get well because he smiles, but smiles because he's gotten well, so John is telling us that we don't pass over from death into eternal life because we love, but thanks to Jesus, we love because we have passed from death into life. If we don't love others, it means that in spite of what we might say, God's love is not really in our hearts and therefore eternal damnation is in our future.

But isn't God asking too much of us? I know and am grateful for Jesus' love for me but I can't love others like Jesus can! Well, let's inspect our spiritual DNA again. Jesus said in our Gospel Lesson: "On that day [the day of Jesus' resurrection] you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (John 14:20). We may be like Cain more than we'd like to admit but believers are also more like Christ than they may realize. What does it mean for our day-to-day existence? The Apostle Paul explains. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is new creation the old has gone, the new has come."

Just as an electric powerbar goes from “dead” to “live” when it’s plugged into an outlet, through the Gospel, the good news of what God has done for us in Christ, we have gone from dead to alive in Christ. What does that mean? It doesn’t just mean we have forgiveness. It doesn’t just mean that Jesus’ love is racing to us. It means that his love is pulsing through us the way electricity pulses through a powerbar to give life to half a dozen appliances that are plugged into it. In the same way, Jesus’ love is strong enough and plentiful enough so that it flows through you to everyone you meet. When we’re plugged into Jesus there is no limit to how many people we can love! See, you’re more like Christ than you realized.

But now John closes by reminding us that loving others is more than just saying, “I think you’re neat!” John wrote: “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:17, 18). In AA circles today, they have a slogan, “Don’t just talk the talk, walk the walk.” So at Open Bible recently, I asked for volunteers to pick up groceries for members in need, pick up prescriptions, take to doctor office if necessary. I had 14 volunteers. Now that’s great. But if I call them, and they say, “Pastor, that date and time, won’t work, I have a round of golf set up, or I am going swimming in the mornings for an hour, and that is the time it happens.” I call them again the next week, and they say they are having friends over for a visit.” It makes me wonder. Were they just talking the talk and not walking the walk. Do they really care about that member that is need of assistance? There is a slogan in professional sports. It goes like this, “Show Me the Money.” Don’t just praise my client and say how important he is and then offer peanuts for a salary. Your cash shows what you really think. Sometimes in the church setting, I wonder about Christians who are financially blessed, and give so little to the work of the church. Wouldn’t you be really showing your appreciation to Jesus, by generously supporting church work, if you were walking the walk?

As far as John is concerned, the heart and the hand are connected. In other words if I have love for you in my heart, I will show it with my hands. I will willingly out the garbage. I will happily write you an encouragement card. I will show and not just speak about my love. The strength to consistently do this comes from staying connected to Jesus.

One thing that bothers me at times is that I want people to like me. And when I stand up for what God has to say about how the world began via creation, stand up against abortion, stand up for God’s plan for marriage, stand up for a government protecting its people by having secure borders, I find a bunch of people really detest me, actually hate me. But John tells me, “Don’t be surprised if the world hates you.” If they hated Jesus, they will hate you. Get thicker skin, Mark. Take up your cross and follow Jesus, who brought you from death to life.

You might be able to impress someone today with the bit of trivia that 16 million men are descended from Genghis Khan but it’s more important for us to remember that we are more like Cain than we’d like to admit. Whenever we let our sinful nature get the best of us so that we don’t show love to others, we’re murderers. But Jesus gave his life for that sin. Continue to put your trust in him for forgiveness and acknowledge that you are now like Christ. Because of him you have the power to love others just as God loves you – not just with words but also with actions. So, Dear Children, Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. Amen...