

“God so Loves the World”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

February 14, 2021 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

Hymns for Worship Video – February 14, 2021

“Blest be the Tie that Binds” #481 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1, 3, 4, 5

Johann Hans Georg Nägeli | John Fawcett

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Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above

We share each other's woes
Our mutual burdens bear
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear

When we asunder part
It gives us inward pain
But we shall still be joined in heart
And hope to meet again

This glorious hope revives
Our courage by the way
While each in expectation lives
And longs to see the day

“Lord the Light of your Love is Shining” #376 in the Book of Praise

Graham Kendrick

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Lord the light of Your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness shining
Jesus Light of the World shine upon us
Set us free by the truth You now bring us
Shine on me shine on me

Chorus

Shine Jesus shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze Spirit blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow river flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth Your word
Lord and let there be light

Lord I come to Your awesome presence
 From the shadows into Your radiance
 By the blood I may enter Your brightness
 Search me try me consume all my darkness
 Shine on me shine on me

Chorus

As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
 So our faces display Your likeness
 Ever changing from glory to glory
 Mirrored here may our lives tell Your story
 Shine on me shine on me

Chorus

“O, for a World Where Everyone” #730 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1, 2, 5

*Words: Miriam Therese Winter Music: Carl G. Glaser Adaptation, Lowell Mason in Modern Psalmody, 1839
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O for a world where everyone
 Respects each other’s ways,
 Where love is lived and all is done
 With justice and with praise.

O for a world where goods are shared
 And misery relieved,
 where truth is spoken, children spared,
 Equality achieved.

O for a world preparing for
 God’s glorious reign of peace,
 Where time and tears will be no more,
 And all but love will cease.

Closing Chorus: “To Show by Touch and Word” #763 in the Book of Praise

*Fred Kaan © 1975 Hope Publishing Company CCLI License # 1952948
 Vs. 3 from the Book of Praise © Words: 1975 by Hope Publishing Co. Music: 1974 WorshipArts*

To show by touch and word devotion to the earth,
 To hold in full regard all life that comes to birth,
 We need O God the will to find
 The good You had of old in mind

Renew our minds to choose the things that matter most
 Our hearts to long for truth, till pride itself is lost
 For every challenge that we face
 We need Your guidance and Your grace

Let love from day to day be yardstick, rule and norm,
 And let our lives portray your word in human form
 Now come with us that we may have
 Your wits about us where we live.

Scripture Texts: Psalm 36:5-10

- ⁵ Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
 your faithfulness to the clouds.
- ⁶ Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
 your judgments are like the great deep;
 you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.
- ⁷ How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
 All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
- ⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house,
 and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
- ⁹ For with you is the fountain of life;
 in your light we see light.
- ¹⁰ O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
 and your salvation to the upright of heart!

Luke 9:28-45

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Jesus Heals a Boy with a Demon

³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹ Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. ⁴⁰ I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” ⁴¹ Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” ⁴² While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

Jesus Again Foretells His Death

While everyone was amazed at all that he was doing, he said to his disciples, ⁴⁴“Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.” ⁴⁵ But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was concealed from them, so that they could not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

Meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As I work in my study at home, I am surrounded by memories. Everywhere I look there is something to remind me of people I love, places I've lived, events in my family's life and experiences I've had in ministry. To my left I turn to see a stuffed toy Logan made at a Build-a-Bear store when he was really little. It's holding a basketball... a foreshadowing perhaps? To my right is the word 'faith' carved in wood, a gift for my induction to my second congregation. Behind me is a pencil sketch of my mother when she was about nineteen years old, and on my desk is a picture of my husband with our first dog as they prepared to leave for a job up north for three months of the summer. However, I think the most touching thing I see is right in front of me when I'm sitting at my desk. It's a hand-painted watercolour of Paterson Memorial Church in Sarnia.

That's the church where I grew up,
 the church where I preached my first sermon,
 the church where we were married,
 the church where I was ordained into the Ministry of Word and Sacrament,
 the church where we gave thanks for my mother's life and faith at her memorial service.
 The painting was a wedding gift from a lifelong friend, and her aunt is the local artist. As I gaze at that painting, a lifetime of memories come flooding into my heart and mind, and they are all about the people I have loved over the years, and how they have shown they love me. It's a powerful reminder of a powerful gift – love.

Today is Valentine's Day, a day that keeps greeting card companies, chocolate producers and flower shops in business. We have been bombarded with ads for jewelry over the past few weeks. Valentine's Day is a day when we are supposed to celebrate romantic love, although it is often extended to expressions of affection between friends, family relations, young classmates and teachers, and even pets. It can be a rather depressing day for those not in a romantic relationship, those who are grieving the loss of a spouse or partner, or those who may be recovering from a relationship that has ended or is in turmoil. Especially in these days of staying away from each other, Valentine's Day can be a tough one for people who live alone, if they even pay attention to it.

Who was this man whose name is attached to a day to recognize love? According to legend, he may have been a Roman holy priest who was executed on February 14th around the

year 270 A.D, in the time of Emperor Claudius II. Claudius the Cruel, as he was known, was having trouble getting Roman men to join his military, and the Emperor perceived it was because they had a strong attachment to their wives and families. So, to get rid of the problem, Claudius banned engagement and marriage in Rome. Valentine, however, recognized the injustice of the situation and kept on performing weddings in secret. When he was found out, Claudius the Cruel had him arrested. The legend says he befriended his jailer's daughter and signed his last note to her, just before his death, "from your Valentine."¹

Our Scripture readings today speak of a love that is so much deeper than any human romantic love that it is difficult to define. The love referred to in these readings is the ultimate love, the love that is defined by Jesus, the one who lay down his life for his friends, and we are his friends if we love him and follow his commands. Luke's account of Jesus on the mountain, in the presence of Moses and Elijah, foreshadows two other mountains that are in the Lord's not-too-distant future.² He will soon find himself alone on Mount of Olives, praying before his arrest, and then on a cross on Gethsemane where he will again be in the presence of two men – this time, criminals, one of whom Jesus will forgive even in the midst of his pain. Both mountain experiences portray God's love for the world, and Jesus' love for those who will mourn his death, and all who would come after them. Jesus is the definition of love, because he is God's love revealed in its fullest. I recently heard one of my favourite preachers and authors, Will Willimon, say being Christian is about believing Jesus is the truth about God. Jesus, who lived briefly, died violently and rose unexpectedly, is the truth about God.³

When Jesus heals the boy with a demon, we see the same thing happen as we saw with the raising of the widow's son. Jesus healed the boy, "and gave him back to his father." Jesus loves us enough to heal us and restore us to each other. We love him enough to trust him to take us fully into his power and restore us to health, strength, life. His healing may not look like what we expect or want, but his healing is what is most needed.

Sometimes it comes through the healing and soothing of mental anguish so we can deal with physical or relationship brokenness.

Sometimes it comes through physical healing.

Sometimes it comes through companionship where there has been loneliness.

Sometimes it comes through earthly death.

Jesus healed us through his own earthly death, and by rising from death to save us from having to endure the death that would separate us from God.

Jesus' healing comes to us because he loves us, because God loves us. And Jesus loves us enough to give his life for us. Jesus loves us so much that he gives us what we need, not

¹ From the article, "St. Valentine Beheaded." History.com Editors. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/st-valentine-beheaded>. A&E Television Network, First published November 24, 2009, updated February 11, 2020. Reference is also made to this legend in an article on Britannica.com (the encyclopedia)

² Workingpreacher.org... Commentary on Luke 9:28-45 February 14, 2021. Written by Karl Jacobson, Sr. Pastor, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Minneapolis, MN

³ Both of these statements were made by William H. Willimon in a talk he gave in the Preaching Grace Series, "Church for the Sake of the World" February 8, 2021.

necessarily what we want. We don't want to hear the story of Good Friday, but we need to hear it. He loves us so much that he gives us himself, his life, his grace.

I am drawn to the words of the Psalmist today because of the repetition of a particular phrase.

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens;

How precious is *your steadfast love*, O God;

O continue *your steadfast love* to those who know you.

Steadfast... unwavering, loyal, persistent, constant. This is God's love! Can the same be said of our love for God? Well... not to the same extent. I don't think we ever stop loving God, but we do waver in our faithfulness. In other words, we mess up in our expression of our love for God. But God has provided a way for us to be forgiven for our wavering, repeatedly. He has given us the gift of confession and repentance, and the assurance of his forgiveness, to his glory.

When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, we saw a glimpse of his divinity shining through. We saw a foreshadowing of his glory, but his final glory would not be revealed in that transfiguration, it would be revealed in a rather shocking transformation, on another mountain, on a cross. A statement I read this week puts it this way:

"When Jesus is finally revealed in his glory, we learn that his glory is not what we think we see. His true glory is other; something else altogether than.

His true glory looks an awful lot like glory's opposite.

His true glory is not to be found in a changed face or clothes of dazzling white, but outstretched arms and bloodied hands and feet."⁴

This is his final glory. And this is his steadfast love for us.

Let's go back to St. Valentine. According to the legend, he died because he went against the Emperor's ban on marriages. He kept performing them, even at the risk of dire consequences. He apparently valued God's blessing of marriage and honoured that over an earthly ruler's selfish desire. It was a pretty gutsy move, and a faithful one. To go against the world to honour God above all can be difficult, and outright dangerous. Valentine, if the story is accurate, did not seek the Emperor's forgiveness, he sought God's glory and grace. He faithfully served God by honouring God's Word and blessing.

You know, when I think about all those reminders in my home study, they all point to something amazing. Someone loved Jesus enough to follow his command, and loved me enough to share him with me, and I know his love through them. The people in those life experiences gave love because they received love. God's love. Remember the old Sunday School Song? Love is something if you give it away, you'll end up having more. Indeed. It's the best and safest investment we can make, as long as it's made in Jesus, in his truth. For his truth is the truth about God, God's love. Amen.

⁴ Workingpreacher.org... Commentary on Luke 9:28-45 February 14, 2021. Written by Karl Jacobson, Sr. Pastor, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Minneapolis, MN