

The Light, the Love, of Jesus  
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 Old Stone Presbyterian Church ~ Lewisburg, West Virginia  
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Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

- 1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever.
- 2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those he redeemed from trouble
- 3 and gathered in from the lands,  
     from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.
- 17 Some were sick through their sinful ways,  
     and because of their iniquities endured affliction;
- 18 they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.
- 19 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress;
- 20 he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction.
- 21 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
     for his wonderful works to humankind.
- 22 And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

John 3:14-21

14"And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

How much does God love us? Enough to send the son, enough to come as Jesus.

How much does God love us? Enough that Jesus doesn't come because we've lived right, but because Jesus sees in us a beauty of creation and the possibility of doing the truth.

We are loved so much by God, that we are God's favorite.

Many of you know the Rev. Larryetta Ellis. She is the pastor at the Edgewood Presbyterian Church here in Lewisburg. We were together at a clergy gathering and she told a story about something that happened many years ago at her grandmother's funeral.

The visitation, the service, the lunch had all happened and finally,

it was just the family gathered at home in the living room, telling stories.

As the stories continued and as they began to unwind from all that had been going on, the grandchildren let down their guard

and began to tell their stories with the preface,

“You might not know, but granny always said I was her favorite.”

It sounded shocking at first, choosing one child over another, until they realized,  
as they told their stories,  
that each and every one of them was,  
and fully believed,  
they were their grandmother’s favorite.

It wasn’t a better-than kind of favorite.

It was a delighted in, adored, valued kind of love that they knew.

They weren’t hurt by the revelation, it was a celebration.

And, in defiance of a precise definition of the word,  
each one, was their grandmother’s favorite.

Being their grandmother’s favorite wasn’t a competition, it was a community.

I don’t mind telling you that Larryetta begins all of her emails to me, “Dear Favorite Anna.”

That’s the kind of love God has for us. The kind of love described in the Gospel of John.

Henri Nouwen writes:

We are the beloved. We are intimately loved long before our parents, teachers, spouses, children, and friends loved or wounded us. That’s the truth of our lives. I hear at my center words that say: “I have called you by name, from the very beginning. You are mine and I am yours. You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests. I have molded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother’s womb. I have carved you in the palms of my hands and hidden you in the shadow of my embrace. I look at you with infinite tenderness and care for you with a care more intimate than that of a mother for her child. I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step. Wherever you go, I go with you, and wherever you rest I keep watch. I will give you food that will satisfy all your hunger and drink that will quench all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you. You know me as your own as I know you as my own. You belong to me. I am your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your lover and your spouse... yes, even your child... wherever you are I will be. Nothing will ever separate us. We are one.”

Every time you listen with great attentiveness to the voice that calls you the Beloved, you will discover within yourself a desire to hear that voice longer and more deeply. It is like discovering a well in the desert. Once you have touched wet ground you want to dig deeper.<sup>1</sup>

But that’s not all that the Gospel of John tells us.

It’s just the beginning.

Because we are told, “For God so loved the World.”

Not that because God so loved you or me, but because God so loved the World.

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Nouwen. Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World. New York: Crossroads, 1992. Pages 30 & 31.

The Rev. Jan Edmiston, co-moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

will be visiting with us in a few weeks.

Many years ago when she was a pastor in Washington D.C. she told a story about something that happened one summer day:<sup>2</sup>

[In the middle of VBS on the second day one of my elders]  
tapped on my door to introduce me to someone  
"interested in joining our church."

First impression: a guy who wanted malt liquor money.

He said he'd just moved to the area.

He said he'd been a member of a Presbyterian church in Boulder  
where his pastor was the younger brother of Semi-Famous Presbyterian  
Pastor in Big Steeple Church in our denomination.

He said all the right things using Presbyterian lingo.

(Key words: Session. Diaconate. Presbytery Camp.)

He said he'd come to the area for a job as a farrier in nearby horse country. (Cool.)

He said he'd lost half of each foot in a frostbite mishap back home.

(Showed me his feet for special emphasis. Gross. Yes, all his toes were gone.)

He said his car died and a friend in Fredericksburg who was going  
on a lengthy Mission Trip was loaning him his car while he was gone,  
but he had no way to get to Fredericksburg.

I said it would be nice to have him join us Sunday.

I said, "Would you like me to show you around?"

I said, "Can we help you in any other way?"

He said, "Well, since you're offering . . ."

60 bucks, a Wendy's Combo Meal, and a train ticket to Fredericksburg later,  
we parted at the train station with a hug and a God Bless You.

And then I felt a little queasy. Something didn't feel right.

[I made a couple of phone calls and googled the man's name]

Yep. My pal. . . . was a con artist.

I am a sucker, a pushover, a softy.

But, you know I feel okay about it all. I treated him like a human being.

I meant it when I said that I was happy to help him whether

he ever came to worship with us or not.

But I really hate it when people lie.

We meet lots of people like [him] in ministry.

He knew the lingo.

He knew just enough to get what he wanted.

But he was all about taking us for all we might give him.

What he did *not* know was that grace abounds [love abounds]  
even for liars and con artists.

And grace [love] abounds for suckers too.

Grace abounds, and God's love too.

And that means that God loves the border agent and the dreamer.

God loves the children living in the rubble of Syria and

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<sup>2</sup> Due to a computer crash, many of Jan's older blog posts no longer exist online. She writes at <https://achurchforstarvingartists.wordpress.com/> and this post was saved, by me, on August 2, 2006.

God loves the children of Old Stone Presbyterian Church.  
God loves the recently divorced and God loves the newlywed.  
God loves the depressed and God loves the happy extrovert.  
God loves the trans child and God loves the junior NRA member.  
God loves the Republican and God loves the Democrat.  
And God loves those who don't know (or care) what those labels mean.

The question of today's text is how we will receive that love,  
and how will we see it in others too?

Because when we do, when we look in another person's face,  
and they in ours,  
and see the love of God, it is nothing less than revolutionary.  
Nothing less than world-changing.

For God so loved the World.  
God so loves.  
So should we.

Amen. Amen.