

Little Sanctuaries

Pastor Laura Hehner

February 3, 2013

What does it mean to feel God's love?

How have you felt God's love in your own life?

What was it like?

When did it happen?

Was anyone else there?

I know it's kinda hard sometimes to pinpoint those exact moments.

It's like someone asking you which minute

you decided you wanted to spend the rest of your life with your partner.

...Flashes of how you know that person has made you feel

over your years together, might come.

You might feel warm. Maybe smile.

(---Depends on the day, I guess)

But other times we *do* know. We *can* know.

Sometimes we're overwhelmed by God's love.

And just like in any relationship we have with another person,

those moments burn deep into our souls,

leaving a clear and lasting memory in our minds,

---a lasting imprint of those minutes we shared that feeling

with that much bigger Life all around us.

For me, it's a deep breath. A goosebumps feeling.

It's one of those moments when you feel eyes on you.

...You know...sort of like that silent, instinctual sense you get

when someone's staring at you from their car, in traffic?

Like that, but more intense.

Feeling God's love brings one of those moments when you need to stop for a second.

---Whatever you're doing---and take a look around stunned,

Like you just heard words of deep pressing truth,

Only the air around you is silent. No *person* was talking.

That's the love of God.

Or at least that the way I've been blessed to experience it in my own life, anyway.

I believe that God, being infinite,

has an infinite number of ways of showing this love to Its creation.

And we each have the potential of experiencing it differently---uniquely---

---while God's life flows through our veins.

But *one* of these ways God shows God's love in the world...

... as we've talked about before, is *through* God's creation.

Through us.

This isn't some theory I came up with on my own. It's a message of the gospels.

Though God is all powerful and can do all things,

past what we even have the ability to imagine,

God also does God's work, through us...through the life God created.

Using us, and guiding us, to move the world in ways

that will help others feel the gentle touch of God's hand in their lives---

---the love of God in their hearts.

The Great Commission. Matthew 28:16-20 sends the disciples then,

and us disciples now, out into the world,

For this purpose.

And really, it's not too far fetched an idea---this thought of God using us---

---when you think about it.

If God is the All, that means God is all things.

Each of us existing as smaller parts of one larger thing.

Individual drops of saltwater in the ocean.

One way of picturing it, would be God being sort of the larger organism,

and each one of us, being individual cells within that one big thing.

And maybe that sounds weird. I don't know.

But we do read about this in 1 Corinthians (which we'll go back to).

And Paul's belief, and my belief—

--well, it's not a sacrilegious thought, because it doesn't make us the *same* as God.

I have cells in my body, but when one of those cells is isolated on its own,

I know that cell isn't me.

It doesn't have my consciousness. My understanding. My ability to move as a whole.

But it's still a part of me. That I know.

And the thought doesn't contradict the Gospels....

Jesus tells us over and over again that we are all one in God.

And to know our neighbor *as* ourselves,

while we move through the world

to share this love God calls us to give back and forth between each other,

in God's soul, again and again.

Now as the Lenten season approaches us,

I thought it would be nice to spend our time together coming up,

Moving our message here, at Deer Park, in theme with the larger church around us.

Again... as one piece of the larger Body of Christ.

And our readings today ask us to think about the prophet Jeremiah,

And his feelings of hesitation to answer God's call to give sound to God's voice in the world.

Jeremiah 1:4-9

4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." 6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly---I do not know *how* to speak, for I am only a boy." 7 But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you [will] go to all to whom I send you, and you [will] speak whatever I command you, 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD." 9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Now I have put *my* words in your mouth."

This experience Jeremiah talks about is just another moment---

---another personal experience of God's love in *one* of our lives...

... and of the call left behind for us---after feeling the touch of God's hand in ours---

To help others feel the same thing.

...It's just one example of our call to work as sent-people,
to keep bringing that love further and further out from ourselves,
Into the unique experiences of others.

...In whatever way God chooses to use us, to do it.

And I like that our lectionary brings us here.

Because we get that way a lot, right? Me. You.

---Hesitant, for whatever reason, to put ourselves out there,
and create a moment where that love can be given.

Hesitant to stand up and out from the silent safety of anonymity and let your face be seen.

---Your voice be heard---

--as you do something unusual to startle the life around you with the powerful love of
God.

And we get scared of it, because---

--well, the world can be pretty scary sometimes, to say the least.

And people can be even scarier.

The other scripture reading which I didn't include in our bulletin today,
was from Luke, ch 4:21-30, when Jesus stands up in his synagogue,
musters himself up inside,
and tells them all that the prophecies of God had been fulfilled in his life.

And wow---the reaction... is not good.

It's that part we hear about a lot,

when Jesus mentions through the suddenly *roaring* crowd,

that a prophet is never accepted in his home town.

---Just before all of the people rise up and try to hurl him over a cliff!

And those are the words of the bible. Not mine.

The exact words in the best translation we've got are they tried to "hurl Jesus off a cliff."

I actually *laughed* when I read it, just because it was so *horrible!*

But sadly believable.

People can get pretty tense.

No doubt about that. ...I've definitely seen it for myself,

along with anyone else who's been alive for longer than ten minutes.

So we get nervous about it. Putting ourselves out in the open.

We want to stay safe and unseen.

But again, as God's people, we're called to keep stepping out,

keep trying, regardless of what comes back in return.

To do our best to keep giving God's love to others, unconditionally,

just as we want to keep receiving that love ourselves.

Paul talks about the importance of this love in our reading from 1 Corinthians, today.

I thought about not reading it, since we all hear it so much at weddings,

but I think it would be good to hear it again, away from white dresses and roses, for a minute,

To listen *fresh* to the words; because it's kinda used the wrong way, at weddings.

...Paul here, isn't talking about romantic love.

He's talking about this love of *God* we share between each other.

And yes, love is love, but we all know there are different ways to experience that feeling.

Our love for pizza is different from our love for our spouse.

Our love for our friends is different from our love for our parents.

And so romantic love is different from the love of God we're called to give.

Here's some of Paul's description of what God's love is, and how important it is

In our relationship with God--the Whole--

to share that love with the all of those other little pieces of God's soul surrounding us,

no matter how much of the opposite people might sometimes show back.

Paul says:

(1 Corinthians 13) If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end... Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Paul here, talking about our experience of God's love.

And how central it is to our call as Christians to help others feel it too, while we give it back.

Paul goes so far as to say that all other things a Christian can do in their faith,
means nothing compared to this.

And I think he was right, because all of those other things---

---the sacrifice, the miraculous gifts, the faith---

They're all only there to help spread this one thing.

To give to the life around us, an experience of the love of God.

...Above all other things, to help them feel those goosebumps spread over their skin.

To suddenly feel God's eyes on them in a room,

through an unexpected experience of the holy, in the middle of their day.

And this holy love can be given in a million different ways in a million different
situations---

---from something as easy as holding the door open for somebody with their arms full,

To doing something as drastic as giving your life for a stranger---

---but each one of those movements in God's soul,

is done always by being the way Paul just described, with others.

(Look into the words again, in your pew bibles, on pg 175 as we close up.)

---By living in kindness and patience,

keeping hope while we endure all of the bad stuff between us.

That love being constant---never taken away---while bearing all things.

This is a reflection of the love of God.

Paul is echoing Jesus' teachings, by asking us to look into the people around us,

not as something separate, but as just other parts of the whole

---of the “complete” containing the “partial,” as he said.

...Giving the life around us as much patience and kindness as we give ourselves.

Each person’s words and actions like a single thought within the larger consciousness of God.

And though we worship God together, each Sunday, inside the walls of the church,
that worship we feel at the sense of God’s love follows us to all places,
even when we’re out there alone.

We live, each one us, beyond these walls as little sanctuaries,
holding the life of God in our souls,
and spreading that love of God far past this hour of worship, now,
into later hours and other hearts...

... a lot of times, the hearts of strangers...

In a way that might give *them* a chance to pause, and look around,
And know the love of God in themselves.

So don’t be afraid. Let God use you to give God’s love,

In whatever form that takes.

Let God’s will move you, so God can move the world.

Amen.