

Morning Meditation ~ Love

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

How do you know what you know? That question has been around for centuries. Perhaps in college you even had to take a class on theories of knowledge when you asked the question, “What is the foundation for facts?” Such a question seems as important today as ever. We swim in a sea of questioning the legitimacy of scientific reports or election results or everyone tossing and throwing around the word, “Fake news”.

So, now you are thinking, “Thanks for that uplifting insight, Pastor Eeyore!”

Or

Not exactly the way to start Thanksgiving week!

Yet, when the writer 1 John says that we will, “know,” I wonder about that word in this world we inhabit. How do we know what we know? This question is one worth spending time with this week. Perhaps we can start with the affirmation that we don’t always know ourselves or others as well as we think. There are countless times during the week I think, “**Why** did I do that?” Or times I say things I instantly and immediately regret. I start by naming that I can be a mystery to myself. Then, there are other times that a truth stirs and swirls within me from my mind, heart, soul, felt from my pinkie toe to the top of my head. It can be a deep knowing, perhaps even beyond words.

Love works that way.

I can’t prove that I love my family. But I know it to be true and long to live every moment guided and ground by that truth.

I can’t prove God’s love. But I experience and encounter the holy hovering and hanging around my life in many ways. I pray that I might be led by such sacred affection.

I can’t prove that love is stronger than hate. Yet, I know the former can feed and fuel my life in faithful/life-giving ways and later one leaves me fearful and feeling alone.

Such love isn’t only sentiment, it is sacred action. Such love doesn’t just warm the heart, it compels and challenges what I do and say. The author of 1 John is clear that love isn’t only an emotion, it is the way we will experience and encounter God. In what ways can love define and determine your life today? Before you answer, I encourage you to be as concrete as you can. Examples include, “I could let God’s love loose when I talk to this person.” Or, “I can let God’s love ground and guide me in that meeting.” Or, “I prayerfully ask for God’s love to led me when I go here.” 1 John makes repeated use of the word, “love” not just because the writer desperately needed a thesaurus; but because only such dogged and determined returning to the love of God will get us through. To return to God’s love for all because love is the pathway to God. This truth that can make all the difference in our lives and world at such a time as this.

Prayer: God grant me strength to not only read these words intellectually, but live them in my life this day, especially when I go (fill in the blank here).” Amen.

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Yesterday we prayerfully pondered letting God’s love have the first, second, third, and last word in our lives. To be caught up in a concert of love that can change everything. Today, I want to encourage you to make a list of encounters and experiences with love. Start with yesterday, where were concrete moments you can point to God’s presence in ways that warmed your heart, soul, mind, and whole life?

Perhaps it was a phone call you had with a friend.
Meal with your spouse or family.
Something you read.

Now, go deeper and be more specific about the sacred.

It was when your friend on the phone said that particular combination of words.
It was the laughter you shared between bits of potatoes at the dinner table.
It was that sentence you highlighted.

Great! Try to dive deeper one more time, even more specific.

It was because I ***needed*** to hear those words from my friend on the phone, I felt affirmed.
It was because laughter is a wonderful way of prayer.
It was because words create worlds and that sentence in the book gave me a vision of a world I want to inhabit.

So often, we skim the surface of our lives. We let ourselves skate by rather than swim in the sacred. To know God is love means we are called to interact with this love for longer periods of question and answer time.

I invite you to keep a list – three ways every day this week you encounter and experience God’s love. Try to be as descriptive as possible. Write a few words...then step back and with anticipation write more...then step back again and write some more. Savor what comes to the surface like the first fork full of fresh made pie. Don’t race through this process, but let it slow you down to taste the experience fully.

I pray this prayer practice will help you know deeply God's love as what can feed and fuel our lives in such a time as this.

Prayer: Open my ears, eyes, heart, and whole life to Your movement today, O God. Amen.

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How is your list of ways you are encountering and experiencing God's love going? If you haven't had time to reflect on God's presence strangely warming your heart and whole life from yesterday, I encourage you to do that at some point, perhaps now.

It's okay...I'll wait. Take your time. Remember, you are savoring these sacred encounters like a piece of pie where each and every bite you might detect a different spice. Keep asking yourself, "Tell me more!" Let the curiosity of your life run rampant.

These lists are a way of knowing, especially in the world today. The point of the list isn't that by the end you will have irrefutable proof of God's existence. The point is for you to know *you* better; the *you* that is still being crafted and created in God's image each day. There is a great line in the hymn, The Summons, "Will you love the you you hide if I but call your name?" This is one way for us to live a response to that question.

When we explore the mystery of ourselves with care and compassion, we can begin to expand and share that with others. If we close ourselves off to the deepest part of our lives, if we choose to not know ourselves, we won't have much compassion or care for others. How we see ourselves is how we see others. The words that stir when we stare in the mirror are carried within us out in the world as our lenses for making sense of what we encounter and experience.

The power of love for self and other is that it is generative. The more we ground ourselves in God's love, the more it will guide us in how we encounter the other. The more we let God's love get a word in edgewise, the more we might come to know this as a *reliable* reality. God's love is inexhaustible, which challenges us in a world of sacristy. We tend to think there is only so much toilet paper or hand sanitizer or vaccine or money to go around. We can get caught up in clinging to what is ours. The fear part of our brain says, "Get yours while the getting is good or you will only have yourself to blame."

To rewire our brains toward love is hard, holy work.

This is why such practices of making lists, detailed and defined lists, can help. So may you and I go out with a Sherlock Holmes/Jessica Fletcher curiosity to investigate and discover what God is up to in the world today. And may we be serendipitously surprised by the sacred in ways that make us laugh with joy and race to write down the description of the love.

Prayer: Love divine, all loves excelling, enter every trembling heart with a holy warmth we need today. Amen.

Morning Meditation ~ Thanksgiving

We have been reflecting on love this week. Love's relative, gratitude, is good to get to know today. I recently read this from the website Salt,

“But there's perhaps no better day than Thanksgiving to reflect on the astounding power of gratitude itself — and accordingly, to commit ourselves to cultivating it more intentionally in the coming year. If we think of “gratitude” primarily as a kind of duty to discharge (*Now remember to write that thank-you note!*), we're missing the boat entirely, effectively reducing one of life's wonders to mere good manners. On the contrary, gratitude is vital force in the world, a profoundly dignifying act that builds relationships, communities, and healthy human hearts. The science on this subject is overwhelming: in study after study, gratitude has been shown to lead to stronger relationships, better sleep, lower blood pressure, fewer trips to the doctor, fewer depressive symptoms, more patience, and more perseverance, among other benefits...our all-too-common tendency to focus on the obstacles in our lives (headwinds) and overlook blessings (tailwinds), an imbalance that over time leads to feeling aggrieved and resentful. In short, focusing on headwinds breeds bitterness; focusing on tailwinds breeds appreciation — and the act of thanksgiving helps call our attention to the winds at our backs.”

Gratitude and love go together like pumpkin pie and cool whip. Gratitude and love hang out encouraging each other joyfully.

I pray that your list of love hasn't felt like a demand or duty, but a holy invitation. I pray that today you will feel a gratitude of God's grace stirring and swirling with you.

I know this Thanksgiving is different and difficult for many. I know for some grief is mixed with gratitude. I know there are feelings of frustration because you cannot be physically with family because of the virus. I know that for some reading this the emotional stew of family causes anger or brokenness, not love.

Gratitude or love are not some sugary frosting that cover over the pain. Gratitude and love are willing to listen and lean into the pain. Gratitude and love won't argue against the brokenness or bitterness. Rather, these constant companions are patient as we process the pain, get it out in words that can feel inadequate, but are all we have.

Today, I pray you will be honest about what is in your heart. I pray you will name and notice the obstacles that can feel insurmountable in the face of this year's edition of Thanksgiving. I pray that as you do, God's love will start to surround you in such a sacred way that even giving voice to our pain might always open you and me to the constant love in our lives for which I give thanks.

May God's love be with you today now more than ever.

Prayer: Holy One sit with me on the sideline as I name and notice what weighs heavy on my heart, then lead me by the hand out to the dance floor where we can move in holy ways with love and thanksgiving. Amen.

Morning Meditation ~

“I have spent my life watching, not to see beyond the world, merely to see, great mystery, what is plainly before my eyes. I think the concept of transcendence is based on a misreading of creation. With all respect to heaven, the scene of the miracle is here, among us.” Marilyn Robinson

We dove into this week with a prayer that we would describe and define the ways love walks into our lives every day.

We sought to be a detective of our own life, searching for detail upon detail of the divine dancing in our midst.

I pray the ordinary has become holy in some way this week.

I pray that your list of encounters/experiences with love points toward what Marilyn Robinson is writing about above.

I pray that through your list of love you start to see the great mystery and know the sacred.

That you might know, not in the way of being able to study it scientifically like a butterfly. Know deep within yourself a truth that you don't need to cling to, because that truth clings to you. Know not as some truth at arm's length but knowing in a way that brings a smile to your face.

Suddenly, knowing isn't only confined to what we comprehend, it is contained in our very being and body. Knowing is when our head, heart, soul and whole life is playing in a symphony of the sacred – not only reading off the script of culture – or caught up in “us” verses “them” – but something else is at play here.

A holy play where we take our part of noticing the miracle of being here, with others, even in such a time as this. A holy play that takes some leftover turkey, a bit of stuffing and cranberry sauces and says, “This is a holy feast where God is present.” A holy play that says, “I didn't get to be with my kids this Thanksgiving, but I got to see and hear them on Zoom or on the phone. It wasn't the same, but it was a blessing.” A holy play that keeps inviting us to search for the sacred, which is always present. May this practice of noticing and naming God's love continue to guide you as we move into the last month of what has been a year!

Prayer: Let Your love loose in my life, O God. Help me to notice. Amen.