

RADICAL LOVE IN A RISKY WORLD:  
RADICAL LOVE IS GODLY  
Luke 3:21-23; I John 4:7-8

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Sooner or later it is bound to happen. A child will pop the question, a friend will want to know, some life circumstance will demand an answer to this existential question: WHAT IS GOD LIKE? Inquiring minds want to know.

Our Muslim friends would likely answer GOD IS ONE—with that we can agree. God is one. Our Jewish friends might reply GOD IS HOLY—and with that we can, likewise, agree for God is holy.

Centuries ago the Apostle John answered the question this way “*God is love!*” That’s what I want us to think about today as we prepare for this baptismal renewal and Holy Communion today.

When Jesus was about 30-years-old, he traveled to the Jordan River to be baptized by his cousin John. In the midst of that experience a voice came to Jesus from heaven saying: “*You are my child, whom I love.*” Has the Lord God Almighty ever whispered those words to you? Listen for His voice today. God loves you; He really loves you. The hope of the world lies in that core value.

**THE LOVE OF GOD IS UNEARNED**

Some of us have read this story of Jesus so many times that we have become immune to its meaning. John is practicing a baptism of repentance. It’s not a cute ritual for innocent children; it’s a drowning symbol for ornery sinners. He calls his congregation a brood of vipers, hardly a statement that warrants a raise in salary. He urges people to repent. Then Jesus comes, and asks to be baptized by John. Do you get it? Do you catch it?

1. The Greater submits himself to the lesser.
2. The Perfect one identifies with the flawed ones.
3. The Savior takes his place among the sinners.
4. Christ our Lord stands beside us and among us.

Don’t miss it. It’s powerful. It’s the core of the Christian gospel.

Stories abound about people trying to wedge their way into heaven. In every case Peter is standing at the Pearly Gates with some questions for us to answer in order to get in. The one I heard this week at lunch was about Forrest Gump. Peter asks him to name two days of the week that start with “T”. Forrest replies “Today and Tomorrow.” Peter asks Forrest how many seconds there are in a year. Forrest replies “January 2nd, February 2nd, March 2nd....” Peter asks Forrest to state the name of God. Forrest replies “It has to be Andy. For my momma used to sing ‘And he walks with me and he talks with me.’” The problem with all these stories is that there is no truth to them whatsoever.

God is love. You don't have to outsmart St. Peter to get to heaven. You don't have to pester God to get his attention. You don't have to grovel to God for God to be good. We need not groan or moan to obtain his mercy. God has already taken the initiative.

The love of God is unearned, unmerited, undeserved — that's why we call it grace. The love of God is unearned.

### **THE LOVE OF GOD IS UNCONDITIONAL**

It's been years ago now, but I will never forget going with a mother to visit her teenage son in a county jail. He had done some things that he ought not to have done, and then made the mistake of running from the police which landed him in jail. The next day we walked into that dark, dingy, hole in the ground, to visit him. I watched in silence as that brokenhearted mother walked slowly up to the bars, then putting her hands through them, pulled the face of her son as close as she could. Then leaning against his cell she said, "Son, no matter what you have done, I want you to know that I love you, and I want the best for you." Mothers are like that, aren't they? That's what mothers do. Both of them began to cry. God loves us like a mother loves a child.

Sometimes we're not nearly so serious about our loving nor unconditional about it. We tend to be sentimental and conditional. We love chocolate ice cream and apple pie. We love a woman because she is pretty. We love a man because he will take care of us. We love sports. We love houses. We love things that make us happy.

The love of God is different. Loving is not one of God's activities. Loving is the essence of who God is. *"God is love."*

When we say that God is eternal — it means his love has no end. When we say that God is infinite — it means his love has no limits. When we say that God is immense — it means his love is incomprehensible.

I speak of something today that I cannot fully grasp in any sense of the word. Isaiah said it well. I think it's in the 49th chapter of Isaiah — Even though a mother may abandon the child that she bore, as strange as that may be, God will never abandon you. He has you engraved in the palm of his hands. The love of God is unconditional.

### **THE LOVE OF GOD IS UNENDING.**

Paul put it well in that great affirmation of faith found in Romans 8. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, persecution or famine, or nakedness or peril, or sword? NO! In all things we are more than conquerors through the One who loved us.*

I want to tell you, when you sink to the bottom, the ground is solid. You can count on it. The love of God is eternal, unending, unfailing.

When the Israelites gathered for worship they sang songs and recited liturgy and

made sacrifices on the altar to the Lord. The Book of Psalms is a compilation of those songs and praises used in worship. One of my favorites is Psalm 136. For some reason it did not make the Psalter in our hymnal. It is on page 544 of your pew Bible. The refrain is this, "*His steadfast love endures forever.*" Twenty-six times in 26 verses the phrase comes back. *His steadfast love endures forever.*

*O give thanks unto the Lord, for his is good.  
His steadfast love endures forever.*

*O give thanks to the God of gods.  
His steadfast love endures forever.*

*O give thanks to the Lord of lords.  
His steadfast love endures forever.*

*He remembers us in our low estate,  
His steadfast love endures forever.*

*He rescues us from our foes,  
His steadfast love endures forever.*

*O give thanks to the God of heaven.  
His steadfast love endures forever.*

Our core values are those things we intend to hold on to no matter what. We will not trade them for a bowl of bean soup or a moment of pleasure. They are the bedrock of our beliefs, the anchors of our faith. Of this I am certain: **GOD IS LOVE.**