

Psalm 25:4-10 <sup>4</sup>Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths. <sup>5</sup>Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. <sup>6</sup>Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. <sup>7</sup>Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good. <sup>8</sup>Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. <sup>9</sup>He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. <sup>10</sup>All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.

Mark 9:2-9 <sup>2</sup>After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. <sup>3</sup>His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. <sup>4</sup>And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters-one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>6</sup>(He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) <sup>7</sup>Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" <sup>8</sup>Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. <sup>9</sup>As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

#### PSALM 25: 4-10 & MARK 9:2-9

THE ORIGIN OF VALENTINE'S DAY IS FOUND IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE, WITH THE FERTILITY FESTIVAL OF LUPERCALIA, WHICH WAS HELD FEBRUARY 13-15.

THEN IN 496 A.D. THE POPE OUTLAWED THE PAGAN CELEBRATION AND REPLACED IT WITH ST. VALENTINE'S DAY ON FEBRUARY 14.

THE DAY ONCE AGAIN BECAME MORE SECULARLY ORIENTED AROUND ROMANTIC LOVE SOMETIME IN THE 1300'S. EVEN SO, THE CHRISTIAN SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DAY IS STILL RECOGNIZED IN SOME DENOMINATIONS.

HOWEVER, FOR MOST OF US- FAITH, OR THE REMEMBRANCE OF CHRISTIAN MARTYRS, IS NOT SEEN AS A PART OF THIS HOLIDAY.

AND YET, SINCE VALENTINE'S DAY IS ALSO ON A SUNDAY THIS YEAR, PERHAPS IT IS FITTING TO WIDEN OUR VIEW OF THE MEANING OF THIS DAY ABOUT LOVE.

SPECIFICALLY, LET'S THINK ABOUT THE BIBLE'S TEACHING THAT GOD IS LOVE, WHICH MAKES THIS DAY A REASON TO CELEBRATE GOD'S LOVE FOR US.

PSALM 25, IS JUST ONE OF MANY PLACES IN THE BIBLE THAT PROCLAIM AND CELEBRATE THE FAITHFULNESS AND THE STEADFAST LOVE OF GOD.

STEADFAST, REFERS TO THE SURE AND UNWAVERING LOVE GOD HAS FOR CREATION, AND IN PARTICULAR FOR MAN AND WOMAN MADE IN GOD'S OWN IMAGE.

IN COMPARISON TO GOD'S LOVE, HUMAN LOVE CAN BE FLEETING, SINCE IT IS OFTEN BASED ON EMOTION, AND CAN BE AS CHANGEABLE AS OUR FEELINGS.

BUT GOD'S LOVE IS NOT. IN FACT GOD HAS NEVER FALLEN OUT OF LOVE WITH US, EVEN WHEN WE HAVE WITH GOD.

OF COURSE SOMETIMES WE DO NOT PERCEIVE DIVINE LOVE FOR WHAT IT IS.

INDEED, WHEN THE LORD MEETS OUR SIN WITH TOUGH LOVE, WE MAY INTERPRET IT AS GOD BEING UNLOVING.

HOWEVER, AS CHRISTIANS, WE OUGHT TO KNOW BETTER, AND REMEMBER THE COSTLY NATURE OF THE LOVE OF GOD.

THE PRICE OF THIS LOVE IS REVEALED IN THE SPECIAL AND UNIQUE VALENTINE GOD SENT INTO THE WORLD.

GOD'S VALENTINE WAS NOT CANDY, FLOWERS, OR A CARD, BUT HIS LOVE INCARNATE IN JESUS.

AND LET US ALSO REMEMBER THAT CHRIST'S LOVE FOR US WAS DISPLAYED BY HIM ON THE CROSS.

JOHN 3:16 IS THE MOST FAMOUS VALENTINE MESSAGE OF ALL IN THE CHRISTIAN VIEW:

“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH, BUT SHALL HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.”

WE MAY BE FAMILIAR WITH THIS VERSE, AND YET WE OFTEN STRUGGLE TO FULLY GRASP THE IMPACT OF WHAT IT MEANS THAT GOD HAS SHOWN LOVE FOR US THROUGH JESUS, HIS SON, AND HOW JESUS LOVES US.

THE FIRST SIGN OF CHRIST'S LOVE IS FOUND IN THE SACRIFICE HE MADE BY HIS INCARNATION AND BIRTH.

JESUS SET ASIDE HIS DIVINE NATURE AND GLORY TO BE CONFINED TO A MORAL BODY SO THAT HE MIGHT PAY THE PRICE FOR HUMAN SIN.

IN HIS HUMANITY HE EXPERIENCED THE JOY AND THE BLESSING OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS, OF WORK AND REST, OF HUMAN LOVE AND LAUGHTER.

BUT JESUS ALSO ENDURED PAIN AND SORROW, TEARS AND FRUSTRATION, AND THE LIMITATIONS OF A HUMAN BODY AND MIND.

AND HE DID THIS NOT BECAUSE HE HAD TO, BUT BECAUSE HE CHOSE TO. THIS WAS THE COST OF GOD'S LOVE FOR US.

THERE IS A POEM ABOUT GOD'S LOVE I FOUND IN MY TWENTIES AND WROTE OUT IN A BOOK.

IT IS PRESENTED IN THE FORM OF A LOVE LETTER, OR PERHAPS IT CAN BE HEARD AS BEING A VALENTINE CARD FROM GOD TO US, SAYING:

“I LOVE YOU! I WANT TO GIVE YOU SOME PRESENTS THAT WILL DELIGHT YOUR HEART. I HAVE FOR YOU LIGHT AND LIFE, HOPE, FORGIVENESS AND REAL FREEDOM.

YOU HAVE GONE AWAY FROM ME. DON'T PUT TRUST IN YOURSELF, YOU WON'T MAKE IT. EVIL AND GREED ARE RAMPANT ON EARTH.

I AM THE SOURCE OF ALL THINGS YOU LONG FOR AND NEED AND CAN'T GET FOR YOURSELF. I HAVE HIGH HOPES FOR YOU. I SENT JESUS TO SHOW YOU. HE OFFERED HIS LIFE FREELY FOR YOU.

HE IS LASTING SATISFACTION; HE SEEKS YOU AND WANTS YOU. DON'T BE AFRAID OR PROUD. COME AND RECEIVE HIM WHOLLY INTO YOUR LIFE.

LOVE HIM AS YOUR LORD. LOVE OTHERS AS I LOVE THEM. CARE FOR ALL THEIR NEEDS, AND YOU WILL BE COMPLETE.

I LOVE YOU, AND WANT YOU TO KNOW AND BE ASSURED IN ALL THAT IS GOOD, RIGHT, AND PERFECT. SO PLEASE BE MINE! ALL MY LOVE-- GOD.”

SO HOW DO WE RESPOND TO SUCH AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE BY GOD? THE PSALMIST OFFERS US AN EXAMPLE IN HIS PRAYER FOUND IN PSALM 25.

“MAKE ME TO KNOW YOUR WAYS, LORD; TEACH ME YOUR PATHS. LEAD ME IN YOUR TRUTH AND TEACH ME, FOR YOU ARE THE GOD OF MY SALVATION....”

TODAY’S PASSAGE FROM THE GOSPEL OF MARK GIVES US ANOTHER EXAMPLE, THROUGH THE VOICE OF GOD.

ON THE DAY JESUS WAS TRANSFIGURED ON THE MOUNTAIN, GOD SPOKE TO THE THREE DISCIPLES JESUS BROUGHT WITH HIM.

THEY HEARD THE DECLARATION FROM GOD THE FATHER THAT JESUS IS HIS BELOVED SON, AND THEN THEY WERE COMMANDED “LISTEN TO HIM.”

THE SETTING FOR THIS EVENT WAS DURING THE LAST YEAR OF CHRIST’S EARTHLY MISSION. THE DISCIPLES HAD FOLLOWED HIM FOR ABOUT THREE YEARS.

DURING THAT TIME JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS ACTIONS WERE SIGNS OF THE PRESENCE OF THE KINGDOM IN HIM.

NOW PRIOR TO THAT DAY, PETER, HAD JUST RECENTLY PROCLAIMED HIS RECOGNITION OF JESUS AS THE MESSIAH, THE CHRIST.

THE SAVIOR THEN SHARED WITH THEM HE WOULD BE KILLED IN JERUSALEM, AND RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

HOWEVER, THEY DID NOT REALLY LISTEN TO HIM, THEY DID NOT ACCEPT THE TRUTH OF HIS WORDS.

THEN ON THE DAY OF THE TRANSFIGURATION, JESUS WENT UP A MOUNTAIN.

AND IT WAS THERE HE RECEIVED CONFIRMATION FROM HIS FATHER THAT THE TIME HAD COME FOR HIM TO COMPLETE HIS MISSION BY HEADING TOWARDS JERUSALEM.

AS WE HEARD IN TODAY’S READING, THE DISCIPLES WITNESSED THIS CONFIRMATION OF JESUS’ DIVINE IDENTITY.

THEY WERE ALSO INSTRUCTED TO LISTEN TO HIM SO THAT THEY MIGHT SUPPORT HIM IN HIS CHOICE TO GO TO THE CROSS AND FULFILL THE DIVINE PLAN OF SACRIFICIAL LOVE.

HOWEVER, IN SPITE THIS REVELATION, THEIR PERCEPTION AND UNDERSTANDING REMAINED CLOUDED, UNTIL AFTER CHRIST’S RESURRECTION, AND PENTECOST.

WE HOWEVER HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OF COMING UPON THIS STORY FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE EMPTY TOMB.

SO WHAT VALUE, WE MAY WONDER, DOES THIS STORY HAVE FOR US TODAY?

THE FIRST THING, IS THE REMINDER OF CHRIST’S DIVINE NATURE AS WELL AS HIS HUMAN ONE.

BUT THERE IS ANOTHER MESSAGE WHICH IS FOUND IN THE WORDS ISSUED BY GOD THE FATHER TO THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS: “THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, LISTEN TO HIM!”

WE KNOW WHAT THAT MEANT FOR THE FIRST DISCIPLES, THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO LISTEN TO HIS TEACHINGS AND LEARN FROM HIS EXAMPLE.

AND THEY WERE TO ESPECIALLY LISTEN TO, MEANING BELIEVE, WHAT HE TOLD THEM ABOUT HIS PENDING DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

BUT WHAT ABOUT US? WE ALREADY KNOW THE END OF THE STORY, SO TO SPEAK.

WE KNOW HOW AND WHY JESUS DIED. AND WE KNOW HE WAS RAISED BACK TO LIFE, FOR FAITH AND THE HOLY SPIRIT CONFIRMS THIS WITHIN US.

WHAT ELSE THEN DO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT JESUS’ TEACHINGS AND EXAMPLE?

A GREAT DEAL, OF COURSE, ENOUGH IN FACT TO TAKE UP A LIFETIME OF BIBLE STUDY, WORSHIP, AND PRAYER.

WE CAN LOOK TO HIS EXAMPLE OF ACTING OUT OF LOVE BY SHOWING MERCY AND COMPASSION TO THOSE IN NEED, AS WELL BY AS FORGIVING THOSE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO RECOGNIZE THEIR SINFULNESS.

BUT SINCE THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL READING IS TO LISTEN TO JESUS, LET'S LOOK AT SOME OF WHAT THE SAVIOR TAUGHT ABOUT LOVE.

SPECIFICALLY, JESUS TAUGHT THAT LOVE IS A TRADEMARK OF HIS FOLLOWERS. HERE ARE THREE EXAMPLES:

DURING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, RECORDED IN MATTHEW 5:6, HE SAID- "BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY."

AND IN MATTHEW 5:44, HE SPOKE ABOUT ONE WAY WE CAN SHOW THIS FORM OF LOVE: "...I SAY TO YOU, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU."

IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 13:34-35 JESUS DECLARED: "AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, SO YOU MUST LOVE ONE ANOTHER. BY THIS EVERYONE WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER."

AND IN JOHN 15:9-10, HE SAID: "AS THE FATHER HAS LOVED ME, SO HAVE I LOVED YOU. NOW ABIDE IN MY LOVE.

IF YOU KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS, YOU WILL ABIDE IN MY LOVE, JUST AS I HAVE KEPT MY FATHER'S COMMANDMENTS AND ABIDE IN HIS LOVE."

THEN JESUS EXPLAINED IT WAS HIS COMMANDMENT THAT WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

IMPLIED IN THIS IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT HE SPOKE ABOUT ELSEWHERE, TO LOVE GOD WITH OUR WHOLE BEING, AND TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELVES.

AND SO WE LEARN FROM THE WORDS OF OUR SAVIOR THAT LOVE MEANS SHOWING MERCY EVEN TO ENEMIES. AND LOVE THAT CHANGES US ON THE INSIDE IS FOUND BY OBEYING GOD AND FOLLOWING JESUS EXAMPLE.

LIVING A LIFE OF THIS ABIDING LOVE IS WHAT WILL SHOW THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW JESUS, THE TRUTH ABOUT HIM AS GOD'S BELOVED SON, SENT INTO THE WORLD AS GOD'S LOVE INCARNATE.

HEREIN WE ARE CHALLENGED TO LISTEN TO JESUS, JUST LIKE HIS FIRST DISCIPLES' WERE CHALLENGED.

BUT WE ARE FURTHER CHALLENGED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT JUST LIKE THE TWELVE DISCIPLES WE HAVE TROUBLE REALLY LISTENING TO JESUS.

WE HEAR HIS WORDS ABOUT LOVE, BUT EVEN AS WE AGREE WITH THEM, WE OFTEN STRUGGLE TO OBEY, AND SOMETIMES PERHAPS GIVE UP TRYING TO OBEY FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

"JUST LOVE", IT IS SO SIMPLE, AND YET SO COMPLICATED, EVEN WHEN WE TAKE OUR EMOTIONS OUT OF IT.

IN THIS WE ARE NO BETTER THAN THE FIRST DISCIPLES, OR THE EARLY CHURCH, OR OTHER CHRISTIANS SINCE THEN.

HOWEVER, JESUS GIVES US A WAY TO BETTER ACCOMPLISH HIS COMMAND-AND IT BEGINS WITH OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE FOR US.

THINK BACK TO THE LOVE LETTER FROM GOD AND THE INVITATION TO ACCEPT GOD'S OFFER OF HIS LOVE.

THIS PROMISE OF GOD'S LOVE, THAT BOTH ACCEPTS OUR FAULTS AND CHALLENGES US TO LET GOD CHANGE US, IS WHAT WILL ENABLE US TO BE LOVING TOWARDS OTHERS.

YOU SEE, IT ALL BEGINS WITH LETTING GOD LOVE US AND LETTING HIS LOVE MAKE US MORE LOVING.

IF WE ALLOW GOD'S LOVE FOR US TO BE A REAL AND AN EVER-PRESENT PART OF OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS, IT WILL HELP US LOVE GOD, OTHERS, AND OURSELVES.

MAY WE ALLOW GOD'S LOVE, SHOWN TO US THROUGH JESUS, FILL US, AND OUR LIVES SO THAT THE WORLD WILL SEE AND BE DRAWN TO THE LORD. AMEN

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