

Community Church of Issaquah

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## In Search of God's Love

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In my nearly 60 years of ministry, I cannot begin to tell you how many times I have heard a person's impassioned and heartfelt pleading when they ask me, "Where is God now that I need Him?" My mother always said, "If you don't feel close to God, who moved?" All of us at some place in our lives have in our hearts or with our voices have wondered "Where is God?" I have. And I would venture to guess that you have as well. For me, today's passage highlights four specific times in my life and ministry when either I or someone else has asked that question. There are certainly more than four life events when we might question God's presence. These are just mine. I am sure you have your own.

### **When the situation is beyond our knowing how to pray:**

One of my former co-workers had asked me to pray for her cousin, Elissa. Elissa was a young woman in her late twenties. She had a beautiful little girl named Bailey who was less than a year old. About 6 months prior to their request, Elissa was diagnosed with terminal cervical cancer. She was undergoing chemotherapy, but the doctors said that it would only prolong her life a few months at best. The family was expecting a miracle and seemed to be in denial that Elissa might not live to be 30 years old. They had asked me to pray, but to be honest, I

didn't know what to pray for. Pray for a miracle? Pray the family would come to grips with reality? Pray for peace of mind? What should I pray for?

Twenty-five years ago, my mother had a massive stroke and fell into a coma. The doctors said she was brain dead. Even though my mother had a do not resuscitate request, the EMT's who were responding to the 911 call did not know that and connected her to life support. When the phone call came telling me all of this, I was at a complete loss in knowing how to pray. For more than two weeks, my family bantered back and forth with the hospital before we were allowed to have her taken off the respirator and life support. I can tell you without feeling a bit guilty that as I sat there that Mother's Day morning when she took her last breath, I was feeling quite distant from God and having no desire to pray after my mother finally had gone to her heavenly rest.

Where is God when we don't know how to pray, and we don't feel a Divine presence? The Apostle Paul tells us in these verses in Romans that we can be sure that even when we don't know how to pray or what to pray for, God's Holy Spirit will do it for us. I suppose we could call that God's working behind the scenes. Paul writes, "For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit Himself pleads with God for us in words we cannot express."

## **When we don't feel connected or sense God's response**

Each of us has been in a situation where we just don't know what to do, and as we wait for some heavenly guidance, we just feel this deep chasm between us and God. We're waiting and waiting and waiting, and probably saying, "Hello? God? Is anyone there? How about some answers here!"

I love that scene in the movie 'Under the Tuscan Sun' where Diane Lane, who plays the part of Frances, has wandered onto this old villa that's for sale. The old woman who owns the rundown place wants to sell it obviously because she can no longer maintain it, but she wants a sign from God about the right person to sell it to. Diane Lane makes her offer to the old woman and the realtor, but the old woman turns her down saying she needs a sign from God. "I understand," says Frances and turns to walk away. Just at that moment, a pigeon in the house poops right on Frances' head. Ironically, that act of having a bird poop on your head was a divine sign in Italy. I'm not sure exactly what that says about Italy, and being Italian, I'd prefer you keep your opinions to yourself. The bottom line is that you and I are often in a place of wanting a sign from God.

There is often a sense of disconnectedness or a straining on our part to find God's response to our situation. It ranges from the simple, "Where should I go to church?" to the complex "How should I plan for my future and how will I pay for it?" We wait for instruction or guidance; we wait for

answers. And in that time of silence, we often cannot sense God's presence and feel God's love. This is perhaps one thing we as Christians should appropriate from the Buddhists – patience. Those who follow the teachings of Buddha spend a great deal of focus time dealing with the act of being patient. Christians are more the microwave religious family who want answers and we want them immediately.

It would be wise for each of us to memorize the verse here that simply says, “Who then can separate us from the love of Christ?” The answer to that is a resounding ‘no one’ and ‘no thing.’ That promise will come in handy on those days when we are feeling disconnected and cannot sense God's response to our need. Perhaps we should focus on verse 37 of Romans 8 which says, “In all things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” Who is the Him Paul talks about here? Undoubtedly, God.

### **When we rely on feelings rather than fact**

Way back when I was young, there was this popular song called “Feelings.” Do you remember it? Went something like, “Feelings, whoa, whoa, whoa feelings --- blah, blah, blah.” It was a sad song about lost love, but it reminds me of how much focus we put on our feelings.

“I don't feel like you love me anymore.” “I don't feel like that is a friendly church.” “I don't feel welcome there.” “I don't feel like God hears me or sees me.” “I don't feel like God loves me.” How many times a day do we use the word

‘feel’? In the opposite direction, there is a sense of being convinced. “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, not powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any tother created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

If there is one strong message that we as believers should latch onto from the Word of God, it is this: life in Christ is not about feelings, it’s about facts. Here are the facts from this passage of Scripture:

- God knows your heart
- God works for your good
- God sets us apart
- God will not condemn us
- We cannot be separated from God’s love, not even in death

Do you hear the word ‘feel’ in a single one of those? How about this one, “God so loved the world that He gave His only son. . .” So, if I don’t ‘feel’ that God loves the world, then that verse doesn’t mean anything? It’s not how you ‘feel’ at any given moment, because those feelings can change. The facts of the Bible will never change.

Remember that. Nothing can separate us from God’s love. Nothing.

### **When we need a reassuring promise or reminder**

There is not a single time in our lives – from birth to death – that we do not need reassurance that we are loved. We

not only need it, but we at times crave it. We behave in ways that we hope will illicit from others some words that tell us that we belong, that we are needed, that we are loved, that we are appreciated. I remember seeing a poster in a ministerial colleague's office that said, "No one can live with the terrible truth that he is not needed." Those are powerful words. I think it could have just as easily said, "No one can live with the terrible truth that he is not loved."

Our focus Scripture passage this afternoon has at its heart that assurance that not only are we loved by God and that love will never be broken, but we are also brought into a relationship with God in which we are indeed needed. It is the mandate that we receive when we accept Christ. Hear these words, "Those whom God has already chosen, He also set apart to become like Christ, so that Christ would be the first among many believers."

There are times when each of us feels we are in a helpless situation. Maybe it's something to do with our health, maybe it's something to do with a difficult relationship, maybe it's something to do with another kind of crisis we must face. To be honest, there are times when I just want to throw my hand up in the air and say, "I give up. I can't do this anymore." But in my prayer time the Holy Spirit reminds me that God's love comes with his strength to move through anything that happens to us. It's another way to know that God loves us. Perhaps you've had your

own experience when you had come to the edge of giving up and God took your hand and brought you back.

God's love for us comes with the assurance that he will also give us the inner power to meet what life brings to us, and the promise that he will be with us through it all. Paul writes, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." Did you get that? More than we ask or imagine. How amazing that God's love for each of us is clothed in his power to be with us and give us what we need to live a meaningful life.

There's a very deep meaning in these verses from Ephesians. Let me read them to you again. "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." Do you hear the assurance that you're already rooted in the love of God? That is why we are called to become like Christ, so that even on days in that work when we might be calling out as he did from our cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But that feeling of absence won't last. You'll come to claim the promise from the Word, "There is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God." Believe it! It's a fact!