

Community Church of Issaquah

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Knowing God's Love

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Anyone who knows me even slightly knows that I have a strong affection for television and movies that are non-violent and always have a happy ending. I suppose that's the reason I most frequently watch such things as the Golden Girls and Hallmark movies. When I retired from my chaplain's position a while ago, I was so excited that I might be able to just sit in my comfy chair and watch as much of these happy ending things as I wanted. Now look. I spend a good bit of my time waiting to be inspired to write a sermon that will have a good message. That's probably better than watching episodes of the Golden Girls that I've seen 8 or 9 times already.

But as I was thinking about this morning's sermon, I recalled a conversation between two people in one movie I had seen. One woman asked another, "How do you know he loves you?" Her answer seemed simple. "Oh, he tells me that he loves me all the time, and he does the nicest things for me." That is truly a simple answer. But let me ask you a question, not a rhetorical one, but one I'd like any of you who feel comfortable answering to share: 'How do you know God loves you?' What's your answer?

It comes to me that there are several ways we know or experience God's love. Let me share a few of those ways. First, David wrote in the Psalm we heard this morning that

those of us who believe in God will receive His blessings. I don't know about you, but my life has an abundance of blessings, not the least of them being this congregation and you people. Each of us who profess our faith in Christ will experience many blessings in our lives. Can you imagine how long the list would be if we sat and wrote down what we believe to be our blessings? Would there be enough ink or paper – or would our printers have enough in their ink cartridges to cover it all? This is one of the ways we know that God loves us. “They will receive blessings from the Lord.” That's God's promise from the words of David.

There's a second part to that promise, however. Not only would we receive blessings but we would receive, as David wrote, ‘vindication from God their Savior.’ Perhaps one of the strongest ways we know God loves us is when we experience this thing called ‘forgiveness.’ During Lent, one of the main areas of focus is repentance and forgiveness, understanding that we are given the gift of renewal of life. This amazing gift come to each of us because God loves us so much that he sacrificed his one and only son so that we can have vindication and a path to a new life. When we have truly repented and asked for forgiveness, God's expression of deep love grants us the joy of being what David says in the Psalm, “The one who has clean hands and a pure heart.”

When Paul wrote his letter to the church at Ephesus, he wanted to tell them how much God loved them. He wrote, “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” That

to me is one of the best ways that God shows us his love for us. He gives us strength or inner-strength to live our lives in a way that would give evidence that Christ truly does live in us. It is that inner-strength that gives you and me what we need to continue doing the very best we can to reflect Christ.

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 I just want to throw my hand up in the air and say, "I give up. I can't do this anymore." While Paolo and I have been going through this process of preparing to be added to the wait list for a heart transplant, both of us have wanted to quit. After so many appointments and hundreds of lab works and thousands of dollars to come to a place where we learn it's all been put on hold, I felt hopeless and wanted to give up. But one day in my prayer time the Holy Spirit reminded 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.

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? And do you see the two other essential promises that we as believers are given?

Our power in life is linked to the Lord's holy power. This doesn't mean that we have strength to lift heavy items. It's not that. It means that each of us is given power to meet and often overcome any situation life presents to us.

Recently I had a long conversation with a friend concerning her niece's attempt at suicide. The niece had told her that God had put her in the place where she thought she should end her life. That is far from my own personal belief about God in our lives. Having been given my own free will to make my own choices, I have come to understand that each of those choices has consequences. God's power is not what put me in a bad place, it's what helps me face whatever happens as a result of my decision.

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.

Perhaps the one thing in all these ways of experiencing and knowing God's love for us is centered in the people God has in our lives. Look around you. When you see these people who are in your circle of faith family, understand that they

are here for you so that you can know and feel God's love for you. If I were to ask you again, "How do you know God loves you?" my hope would be that you would include in your answer, because God gave me these people to love me in his place.

If we were to sit and reflect on the depth of our search to know how God loves us, there would certainly be a lot of time spent on who in your life is a reflection of God's love. My mother used to tell me, "No one comes into your life by accident, and you can learn something from everyone you meet." Over and over, I have experienced a deep feeling of God's love by the people in my life. When my son tells me at the end of every conversation, "I love you, Dad," I know that's an earthly voice that tells me God loves me.

When I look at my past of almost 60 years of ministry, I can see exactly how God showed his love for me by the blessings I have received in my calling. When I contemplate the struggles I have had in my own life and realize that God gave me strength and power to overcome them, I feel God's love. And when I take the time to think about Easter and what it means for those who choose to profess our faith in Christ, I know God loved me enough to sacrifice his son so that I can experience forgiveness and renewal of life.

So let me ask you again – this time you don't have to answer out loud – "How do you know God loves you" – will you have a different answer? I know I will. And let me close with this thought, I am very grateful that God has showed me how much he loves me by putting you into my

life. Now you can see that I really do have a fondness for stories that have a happy ending. Mine isn't ended, but it sure has a lot of happy things going on now. Mine sure does show me how I can know God really loves me.