

“Facets of Love”

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1 John 4:7-21

Ah, God is love. I remember when I was a little teenage church nerd, I came across this passage and was just floored. I think I had always known this idea, this distillation, that “God is love” to be true in my bones, and had dreamed and sang and prayed and created all sorts of ways to engage “love” and “God” together, but I had never encountered such a sweep-the-table-off sort of clearness to the deepest hope I had: God is love. Straight up. This made me feel safe, like I could trust God. And relaxed, like, this was all that really matters. Whatever I do, I could strive to do in love, and could never miss the mark too much. This is the deepest truth of my encounter, my relationship with God. Not what I did or didn’t do, but that God is love.

And it’s so simple, such a terse statement. But it’s so deep it’s almost dizzying. God is love. The writer’s discourse here looks at the many facets of love, adoringly and reverently up to the light.

Imagine yourself as a jeweler taking in and turning about the facets of a gem in the sunlight. You stare into the depths of the small but dazzlingly complex item, and see internal angles and workings that send out great rays of wonder. Something ordinary, a wall, a hand, coffee cup, is made altogether different and new in the cast light from this precious and complex gem.

That’s like God’s love described in this passage here. The many rays that come out of the love first from God are multihued, complex, and beautiful. The love that God shines into our depths, and that love is reflected. It reaches out long, beyond anything we ourselves can do. The text here trains our eyes on the many dimensions and textures of that love that comes alive in us.

Letters like this served to remind fledgling Jesus followers what it meant to be “In Christ” and follow Jesus. The remarkable thing they and we now work with is love incarnate. In Jesus, God’s love was made into flesh, was made a person, incarnate on this earth and offering the love that God longed to share with the world in real human encounter—touching aching and

dismissed bodies, sharing bread and fish, washing feet. I bet Jesus loved to give his friends, his mother, a shoulder rub from time to time. God's love was felt in action.

And the whole point of the letters included in the New Testament is to remind the communities who gathered that they were like being Jesus in the world. That they, like Jesus, were to be the continuation of that love made real among people. That being "in Christ" is to love with the same wild, dangerous abandon that Jesus did. To love with that same love that tears walls down. To love with that same love that threatens the status quo, that challenges how power is held, to love with that same love that draws those who have been outside, in. TO love with that same love that says that black and brown lives matter, to love with that same love that affirms love regardless of gender expression or orientation. To love the world and the beloved (and by beloved I mean *all*) people in it just as God does.

The 1995 movie *Dead Man Walking* relates the story of Sister Helen Prejean ministering to Matthew Poncelet, a convicted murderer in depraved and cold blood. She remains close to him even when this proves unpopular, even when she questions what she is doing. She doesn't have a strong sense of what she is doing, but in the absence of a clear ethical path, she makes the best next choice she can: She loves like Jesus, sticking with even the most despised people. It's her training, in love. She has a lot of anguish, but she makes the commitment, when in doubt, to love. And so as Poncelet is escorted to the execution chamber, she tells him, "I want the last thing you see in this world to be the face of love. So you look at me when they do this thing. I'll be the face of love for you."

This love is one that stands with people who are cast out, who are treated as less than. Love writ large like this, then, the plural of love, looks like justice. It is taking responsibility for our relationships and our neighbors, to reflect that love we know in God through and with each other. To hear the stories of those who are not like us, and be willing to be transformed by them.

I think the call to be God's love incarnate in the world is one that illuminates the spaces in our lives, in our heart, where we can invite God in. Because I don't believe that God calls us to this and then leaves us unequipped, relying solely on our own devices. I think God's call to love illuminates those places where we can't go it alone.

We love with God's love. We reflect it, we communicate it, but we don't have to heft it together ourselves. And that's a really good thing, because loving can be one of the hardest things we do. And just as God loves through us, God grants us the strength to love.

Love gives us power to do more than we can ever imagine.

Love abides in us, and God grants us the strength and the vision to create glimpses of love here on earth. So turn that faceted heart of yours around in the light a bit. Get it out there. See where it catches the light, and in loving, see what those rays light up. You might be astonished. Amen.