

Love

2024 Lenten Devotional
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“God is love.
That means that the beginning and the end of human life
Are sheltered in God’s hands.”
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The above quote was written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer from Tegel Prison in Berlin, Germany to his parents in 1943. Bonhoeffer, a German pastor, spent the last two years of his life in captivity before he was hung just weeks before the end of WWII.

According to Wikipedia “**love** encompasses a range of strong and positive emotional and mental states, from the most sublime virtue or good habit, the deepest interpersonal affection, to the simplest pleasure”. As individuals we describe and feel many kinds of **love** but perhaps with closer concentration, we can realize that we benefit with the **love** God gives us each day.

During coffee hour after worship on a Sunday in January I had a delightful conversation with Eileen French. I mentioned the topic of this devotional to her. I can always count on interesting input from Eileen. On the way home she sent me an email asking if I had thought of “What’s **Love** Got to Do With It?” In 1984 Tina Turner set the world on fire singing this song, written by Graham Lyle and Terry Britton. In the song, Tina asks the question describing **love** as “a secondhand emotion”. But **love** is vital to human beings. We need to be **loved** and we need **love**. Perhaps by Easter we will be able to answer Tina’s question, what does **love** got to do with it?

Mark 12:30 *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*

Today marks the beginning of a personal journey. This journey is one that Christians undertake each year. It is strictly a “coincidence” that this year’s Ash Wednesday falls on February 14 (known to us as Valentine’s Day). The topic of discussion for this Lenten Devotional is “**love**” and was selected by me before I had any idea that Ash Wednesday would fall on Valentine’s Day. Valentine’s Day reminds us, calls us, to remember those people who **love** us and those whom we **love**. Significantly, this year’s Valentine’s Day calls us to remember the **love** that God has for us, each and every saint and sinner.

Times and events haven’t seemed to settle down for anyone in 2024. The threat of a recurring pandemic, the upcoming national elections, and people caught up in war have continued to keep even those not directly in harm’s way maintaining a tense mood. But perhaps turning our focus to **love**, specifically the **love** of Christ for his beloved children (whom we are called to be) will help settle our hearts and minds on a spiritual journey that will enrich our lives so that we can soothe the lives of others.

There are and will always be some people that are easy to **love**. They are generous and caring of others. If someone needs a helping hand, their hands out stretch quickly. These empathetic helpers are readily willing to help others. Their generosity is oftentimes limitless. Unfortunately, we aren’t all like that. We have to be asked or reminded to do our part. But once we have felt the **love** of Christ it is natural to want to share that **love** and light with those around us. Sharing the gift of **love** is a gift that both the giver and receiver share. When we share God’s **love** with others, we will carry forth the light of Jesus into the darkness.

Merciful God, guide us to share the light and **love** of Jesus with our brothers and sisters. Help us to be aware when others are in need so that we might stretch out our hands to be of assistance. Gently remind us to act in **love**. Thank you for your **love** and care. AMEN

Thursday

February 15, 2024

Mark 1:11 and a voice came from heaven: “You are my son, whom I **love**; with you I am well pleased.”

Jesus was **loved**. He was **loved** by God and claimed as God’s son. God looked down from Heaven and announced to the world that Jesus was His son! God went beyond announcing the relationship but added **love** and being well pleased with Jesus. Could there be anything more a parent could say to a child that would add any more depth of feeling than God described in this public assessment of the relationship?

We all need to know that we are **loved**. Babies need **love** to thrive. Children need **love** to thrive and not surprisingly adults need **love** to thrive. But not everyone grows up knowing **love**. Fortunately, some of this void is filled by others outside of the family. The Positivity Project is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping young people build strong interpersonal relationships. There are articles on the internet describing the work of this project with America’s youth. The founders of this project realized that “when children know they are **loved** because of who they are – not because of what they have done – they begin to realize the true value of their lives.” The Positivity Project’s conclusion to their research points out that when a needy youth realizes that they do indeed have inherent value and are shown that they are **loved**, they become adults who are more likely to make the most of their lives.

We all need **love** to be our best. At times we might need reminders that we are **loved** but with hope and faith in God, we will indeed find God’s presence in our lives. When we come from a **loving** family, be it our biological family, a church family or a circle of close friends, we receive **love**. Knowing we are **loved** should be obvious and never be an issue. We are children of God, sustained by God’s **love**.

Gracious God,

You claimed Jesus as your Son, you pronounced your **love** for him in a bold manner and significantly told him that you were pleased with him. Help us to follow your example and joyously live in confidence that as followers of Jesus, you **love** us and claim us as your children. Guide us to live a life that brings a smile to your heart knowing that we are guided by your **love**. Inspire us to actions that are pleasing to others and to you. AMEN

Friday

February 16, 2024

Psalm 86:5 *You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in **love** to all who call to you.*

It is an unfortunate truth that while forgiveness is something beneficial it can be a challenge for us to forgive others. Sometimes forgiveness is simply beyond us. Thankfully God offers to forgive us, we only have to ask. God's hand is always reaching out to us to offer comfort and support. Significantly God offers to **love** us and to forgive our sins.

There are positive benefits in forgiving someone. Even if we dismiss the self-serving benefits of forgiveness, God clearly calls us to forgive others. Why is it so hard? Is there a way to ease our lives into a habit of forgiveness? If we keep making the same mistakes, shouldn't we realize that others make mistakes too? What is the cost of forgiveness? We seem to be going in circles that are very tiresome. If **love** is offered and the reward is great, why not accept the **love** if the only payment is our forgiveness?

There are many examples of Jesus forgiving others for much more challenging offenses than we experience. But still, I personally can be resistant to forgiveness. I can hold grudges and be hard hearted. Sadly, this seems to be more common than what we might hope for. Consider the following: does holding a grudge bring positive or negative feelings, does forgiving someone who has caused you pain bring relief or resentment, does living a life filled with **love** bring light into your life or does life filled with bitterness lead to only more hurt or darkness?

Perhaps as children we lack experience to know that forgiveness is a gift to both the giver and to the receiver. As adults we are called to account. It is a sobering thought to think that we expect that God will be more forgiving of us than we are willing to forgive. Now would be a great time to make the decision to live a life based on **love**. Certainly, if we make this Lenten journey concentrating on God's **love**, we might find a pleasing result on Easter morning.

Gracious God, your **love** and forgiveness is a blessed gift. Thank you. Gently remind us that we walk in your light and always your **love**. Thank you for all of the gifts that you have bestowed on us and lead us to walk in your path. AMEN

Saturday

February 17, 2024

*Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in **love**.*

In my days of rushing to get things done
I hurry and scurry and bumped none too gently
Into whatever gets in my way.

There are deadlines and commitments to complete
The blinders I wear are meant to help
Focus on the goal and achieve.

There on the sidewalk walks an old woman
A dog happily strutting by her side
Contentment radiates in their wake.

Did rushing improve my efforts?
Did I find joy in my personal involvement?
Where is time going that I can't stop and say hello?

We are called to humbleness and gentle living
With patience I will reach out to you
With **love** you respond and offer **love**.

Walking quietly by your side I feel peaceful
My hand stretches out - open in offering
Love grows - binds us together in gentle hope

We are at peace in God's **love**.

Dear God,

Thank you for your **love** and patience with us. Help us to evolve into the people you mean for us to be. Gently remind us whenever we make mistakes that you are with us and will be with us forever. Amen

Sunday

February 18, 2024

John 8:12 *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. ... Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

I was an adult before I was able to serve as an acolyte during a worship service. I consider this "job" one of the many gifts that God has bestowed on me. When I was growing up only boys were allowed to be acolytes. I didn't understand this then and am not sure if I want to study and find out the thought that went behind this practice. Thankfully, some traditions have become more inclusive. For example, all church-goers, from the oldest of us to the youth-in-service-training are welcome to be acolytes.

The congregation is seated as the acolyte comes forward at the beginning of a worship service to bring the light of Christ into our assembly. Each candle is lit in a specific order to mark tradition and value. The candles continue to burn and shine light during the service as a visible reminder of Christ's presence. At the conclusion of the service, the acolyte comes forward to extinguish the candles again in a specific and symbolic order during the final hymn. Before extinguishing the final candle, the acolyte will light the candle lighter and extinguish the final candle. The acolyte bows to the cross and then turns. It is then that the acolyte carries the light of Jesus Christ out into the world as the congregation follows.

As an acolyte we can bring the light of Christ's **love** to others and what a precious gift this is!!! When I was first allowed to be an acolyte and every time since, I remember as I carry the light of Christ into and out of the sanctuary that this light represents Jesus' **love** for us. I feel humbled and fulfilled as a child of God.

Gracious God,

There are so many ways that we can carry the light of Jesus into the world. Guide us to be acolytes for others so that they might see the light of Christ. Help us to be faithful to your message of sharing the **love** with others. As the waves in the ocean continually wash upon the shore, let our work continue to wash upon those around us so that all might know your **love**.

AMEN

Monday

February 19, 2024

1 Corinthians 13:1 *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.*

The above Bible verse aptly describes a person living without **love**. Being “a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” is not something for which most people would aspire. This type of noise would get old very fast. Not only would one end up with a headache, but no one (including your mom or dad) would care to spend time with you. As someone who **loves** to sing during worship services there are times when a bit of dissonance in a hymn can be interesting. Dissonance can add to the overall quality of the particular song. But repeated resounding gongs or clanging cymbals? No, not ever. If **Love** is not to be shared really what is the point?

Sadly, **love** can seem to be out of reach. We seem to be surrounded by the idea of **love**, but at times **love** appears to be beyond our reach. **Love** is also one of the major topics of books and movies. People **love** “**love**” and they **love** to hear about it, read about it and especially **love** to live in exciting times and to be “in **love**”. Human beings need **love** in their lives. But is the **love** that God offers us so freely at times challenging to accept? Why would that be?

Augustine of Hippo, also known as St. Augustine was born on Nov. 13, 354 and died on August 28, 430. Many of his writings have survived and been explored by numerous scholars and theologians. Certainly, something that was written that many years ago and studied intently might contain something of interest for us. When asked what **love** looked like his answer was that “**Love** has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what **love** looks like.” Obviously, Augustine’s definition rings as true today as when he first defined **love**.

Heavenly Parent, thank you for your **love**. Thank you for inspiring us to join our efforts with others to uplift people in need. Guide us to use our hands, feet, eyes and ears to help others so that they might to know your **love**. With your **love** we can accomplish many things for the benefit of those in need. With **love**, help us when we sound like the gongs and cymbals. AMEN

Tuesday

February 20, 2024

1 Corinthians 13:2 *If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing*

Without **love** what are we? In many ways this verse sounds very much like the worries that people have about artificial intelligence. We now use computers to assist weather predictions, future movement of people, the spread of disease and a myriad of other things. These calculations can be very accurate and helpful for planning. But some wonder if we can or will be replaced by machines? That's where **love** separates the living from the machines.

Without **love** we are nothing.
Without **love** what are you to me?
Without **love** I am blank.

Without **love** we are nothing.
Without **love** there is no music.
Without **love** my heart never sings.

Without **love** we are nothing.
Without **love** I have no family.
Without **love** my soul withers.

Without **love** we are nothing.
Without **love** the sun no longer shines.
Without **love** clouds don't dance across the sky.

Without **love** we are nothing
Without **love** I am alone.
Without **love** – I am nothing.....

Gracious God,

Let **love** be the foundation of my life. Guide me to see **love** in the smiles of others and let me smile to share **love** with others. Help me focus my efforts so that the rich bounty that you have given us can be shared by all of your people.

AMEN

Wednesday

February 21, 2024

1 Corinthians 13:3 *If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have **love**, I gain nothing.*

Amy Beatrice Carmichael was born and raised in Ireland. She became a Christian Protestant missionary and founded a mission in Donnavur, India. Carmichael was commissioned by the Church of England Zenana Society to help young girl (and later boy) orphans who were forced into prostitution. She served in India for fifty-five years and wrote thirty-five books about her work as a missionary. Carmichael wrote, "You can always give without **loving**, but you can never **love** without giving." To **love** is to share the light that Christ brought into our lives. Carmichael shared her talents, time and **love** with the children who were in despair need.

Unfortunately, we have examples of people who have maintained an appearance of working to do good work when their main concern was not for others but was for their own personal gain. In "Empire of Pain" by Patrick Radden Keefe, we read the history of one family, the Sacklers, who are one of the richest families in the world. They have made huge donations to the arts and sciences but their wealth was gained through marketing opiate drugs and downplaying opiate addiction, leading to the addiction of hundreds of thousands of people. They lobbied for the FDA and doctors to prescribe these drugs without regard for the detrimental long-term effects. Whole communities were devastated.

So, on one hand we have one woman whose life was lived **loving** people and working to help those in need. The other hand shows us a family who **loved** not people, but who **loved** money. We can cite clear examples of how **love** can warm the hearts of others, but also of how **love** of possessions can destroy lives.

Generous God,

Open my heart to **love** so that I might share this blessing with others. Guide my gifts to be gifts that reflect the **love** God has bestowed on me. Help me to understand the significance of **love** so that in turn when I share material objects with others, these gifts reflect your **love**. AMEN

Thursday

February 22, 2024

1 Corinthians 13:4 *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.*

“To **love** someone means to see him as God intended him,” wrote Fyodor Dostoevsky. This is a very wise statement. When people live in **love** and follow God’s word, **love** blossoms and thrives. God wants us to be and to do our best. Accepting that this verse is a good recipe for future joy and happiness is beneficial for a fulfilled life. God has given us this verse as a blueprint to living a life filled with **love** and light.

One of my frequent prayers is to be the person that God intended me to be. Unfortunately, I am not a patient person. Somehow patience can somehow frequently elude me. But that doesn’t mean that I won’t continue to strive to be patient. My husband’s attribute of patience is a gift that my children, grandchildren and I sincerely appreciate. To be patient and kind, while not being boastful or proud would make our lives so much better.

We certainly do not want to envy what others possess or what or who they are. Possessions can come and go but the people in our lives hopefully will be with us for our lifetime. What more could we ask in relationships than to have the people we **love** be patient, kind, and not proud or boastful, and certainly not to envy who or what we are? As with most things our behavior influences the behavior of others. Kindness and a smile usually are well received.

Generous God, it is with our thanks that we offer this prayer to you. We thank you for the words of the New Testament. Patience, kindness, and **love** enhance our lives. When we turn against envy, not being proud or boastful we can feel your **love**. When we stop and feel the cool breeze upon our faces, see clouds dancing gently across the sky, when we work to do your will, when we acknowledge that we need your guidance, **love** and wisdom we are indeed your children. Amen

Friday

February 23, 2024

1 Corinthians 13:5 *It (love) does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.*

It is an unfortunate truth that while forgiveness is something beneficial it can be a challenge for us to forgive others. Sometimes forgiveness is simply beyond us. Thankfully God offers to forgive us, we only have to ask. God's hand is always reaching out to us to offer comfort and support. Significantly God offers to **love** us and to forgive our sins. Although this sounds easy and very wise it is a struggle.

There are positive benefits for forgiving someone. Consider the following: does holding a grudge bring positive or negative feelings to mind, does forgiving someone who has caused you pain bring you relief or resentment? Does living a life filled with **love** bring light into your life or result in a life filled with bitterness?

In the book club at Holy Cross, we read the book, "Braiding Sweetgrass" by Robin Wall Kimmerer. She is a Potawatomi Native American and an Environmental Biology professor. She writes, "I wonder if much that ails our society stems from the fact that we have allowed ourselves to be cut off from that **love** of, and from, the land. It is medicine for broken land and empty hearts." There is a great deal of depth in this statement. People evolved working and being close to the land. It is what connects us to our environment and to the life of other life forms. Somewhere along the line many of us have lost this connection. When we plant seeds or plants and are rewarded by food or simply beauty our hearts can be restored. Too easy you might ask?

Kimmerer goes on to write, "Knowing that you **love** the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth **loves** you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond." Perhaps we should carefully consider these words. We believe that God **loves** us but also God **loves** the earth. How better to improve our lives by simply planting a flower or saying hello and smiling at someone?

Forgiving God, lead us to restore our broken relationships with each other and with our environment. Help us to remember that we are a part of the earth and that the earth is more than human beings. Encourage our efforts to live a life of value, minimizing our impact of your creation. AMEN

1 Corinthians 13:6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth

It is a shortcoming of people to delight in something bad happening to people who we might not like, or to those who dislike us. We might not be willing to admit it, but having someone whom we don't like face a potentially troubling time seems to bring a sense that the offender is receiving "their just desserts". For those who delight in this revenge, I hope they limit their satisfaction over whatever challenge the offender might face and act to reduce any consequences.

On a different level we have different reactions to circumstances that can quickly get out of hand. Have you ever watched an episode of America's Funniest Home Video? Each week the program shows videos that people have sent in to the producers. The videos are in competition for the funniest video of each particular week. Viewers vote for his/her favorite video. The winner wins a cash prize of \$20,000. These videos usually are funny and often show someone falling, crashing or being frightened. Hopefully no one is seriously injured.

One late-night-show host has people set up situations where the parents of trick-or-treaters tell their children a tragic story. On the morning after Halloween the parents tell their children that they have eaten ALL of the Halloween candy that the children had received the night before. As expected, the children become visibly upset and usually end up crying. The kids look seriously heartbroken. It is fun to share laughter with our **loved** ones. But is it **love** if the joke is at the expense of someone else, especially your very own children? Being a parent holds responsibility for the wellbeing of our children. For some reason parents who participate in this prank think that this is acceptable to lie to their children for laughs and a winning entry. This is something that I don't or can't understand. What would our thoughts be if our God decided to tease or make a joke at our expense? Perhaps we should strive to model ourselves after the **love** that God has gifted to us.

Loving God, thank you for **loving** me. Thank you for being present in my life. Thank you for gifting me with gentle reminders of your **love**. Guide me to act in **love** and kindness so that I bring your light to others. In this I pray. AMEN

Sunday

February 25, 2024

1 Corinthians 13:7 *It (love) always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran theologian and pastor, sat in a cold cell in isolation (Tegel Prison, and then Flossenburg Concentration Camp, 1943-1945) during the last two years of his life. Bonhoeffer wrote that he would sing through pieces of music that he learned. The music helped to transport him to another place, a place where he was free, and where he could feel the **love** of his family and of God surround him.

Bonhoeffer also used his time in prison to write. He was able to write letters that were smuggled out of the prison to his family and close friends. He was also able to write poetry and theological work. The depth of his belief and **love** for God is found in the first stanza of one poem. Even in his isolation Bonhoeffer felt the **love** of God surround him as he wrote this poem.

By **loving** forces silently surrounded,
I feel quite soothed, secure, and filled with grace.
So I would like to live these days together,
and go with you into another year.

There have been many times in the past decade when I begin to feel beleaguered. One of the most precious gifts that God has given me was and is the writings and knowledge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Nothing that I have ever faced has brought me to the level of despair Bonhoeffer must have faced while in prison. Our scripture reading today so clearly brings the example Bonhoeffer set for us. In his final message to his friend Bishop George Bell of England he said, "This is the end. For me the beginning of life."

The depth of **love** that Bonhoeffer felt for his family, for friends, his students and for all people was an extension of the **love** that he felt that God had bestowed on him. Even as the bombs fell, closer and closer to his prison cell he felt hopeful, peaceful and looked forward to the future. It is with admiration that I read Bonhoeffer's work. He truly was a child of God.

Precious God,

Thank you for the example and life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. His words inspire us to **love** and to listen to others. AMEN

Monday

February 26, 202

1 Corinthians 13:13 *And now these three remain: faith, hope and **love**. But the greatest of these is **love**.*

Love is a powerful emotion. People have been studying, writing, singing and acting out of **love** throughout human history. **Love** has inspired great acts of courage, sacrifice and emotional attachment. We seek **love** and hopefully share our **love** with others. At the website familycenter.org we find a group of Native Americans working to improve people's mental health and wellbeing using the principles of Dr. Gary Chapman described in his book "The 5 Love Languages". **Love** shows itself through words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts (i.e. someone bringing you a cup of tea after a long day), quality time and physical touch. We all need the listed items to maintain our wellbeing.

On the one hand we are blessed with the ability to **love** and be **loved**. Sadly, on the other hand we also have the ability to hate. Native Americans for too long faced not **love** when met with settlers but with suspicion, scorn and too frequently with death. Too often in the past and sadly today we have focused on the differences we have with others. All too often we read in the news that we are separated into groups and frequently one group has no tolerance for other groups. Wars are being fought with rising violence as our advancement in technology developed bigger and more powerful weapons of destruction.

Within Christianity, we have different denominations. Within our denominations there have been splits within particular denominations, including within the Lutheran church. It seems that we focus on reasons to disagree rather than celebrate when we are able to agree. Rather than acknowledging and focusing on our shared beliefs, we (including myself) can call attention to what is not working. Groups within a church can also splinter the church. What can I say when as a Lutheran, my group split with the Catholic church over 500 years ago? But when Luther was tried, convicted and sentenced to death what can we expect? We can **love** and pray with others to unite. Hopefully we will respond to God's call for us to **love** as God **loves** us. In this, as with all, we need God's help and guidance.

Precious God, you give us faith and hope but everlasting **love** is the key to our foundation. Lives built on the bedrock of **love** will surely withstand life's challenges. For this blessing, we are grateful thank you. Illuminate our paths forward so that we can share your **love** abundantly. Give us the courage to speak with a clear voice so that **love** is our message for all of your children. AMEN

Tuesday

February 27, 2024

Matthew 22:37 Jesus replied: “**Love** the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

Brandon Hadley posted an interesting article on Mediashout.com in 2021 about Charles Wesley. In 1738 Wesley had returned to England from a trip to the American Colony of Georgia sick and heartbroken. A friend had suggested and offered Wesley a copy of Martin Luther’s work on Galatians. Hadley wrote that Wesley was inspired by Luther and realized that God gave and lavished his **love** on Wesley freely. Wesley was safe in God’s **love** every day all day and night long. This inspiration led Wesley to write the following hymn in two days.

*Refrain. Amazing **love**! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!*

*‘Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.*

*And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior’s blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?*

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;*

*‘Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!*

*My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.
No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!*

*‘Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.
He left His Father’s throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;*

*Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.*

*Emptied Himself of all but **love**,
And bled for Adam’s helpless race;*

Gracious God, thank you for inspiring the words of Charles Wesley. Help us to embrace them and remember that your **love** is a gift freely given. We are your children and strive to do your will. AMEN

Wednesday

February 28, 2024

Matthew 22:39 And the second is like it: '**Love** your neighbor as yourself.'

The World Relief Organization has developed a list of seven ways to **love** your neighbor: 7 Ways to **Love** Your Neighbor

- Take the Initiative and Value Small Acts of Kindness. Helping one another without being asked to do so is part of the culture in Rwanda. ...
- Spend time. Quality time is said to be one of the five major ways people experience **love**. ...
- Share a meal. ...
- Foster Reconciliation. ...
- Listen. ...
- Advocate. ...
- Go Together.

This list provides us with solid information to complete the assignment that Christ has given to us. If we need more guidance on how to **love** our neighbor, we can always check the internet for more examples. The internet can provide almost instantaneous information. Some of the information is worthwhile and should inspire us to reach out to others with **love**.

Perhaps we don't find it necessary to find our idea of **love** on the internet. Perhaps we are all adjusted and are happy as clams. Perhaps we live in a perfect world but somehow that just isn't realistic. The evening news on a daily basis details crimes that exemplify our societies lack of **love**. This list does include a great deal of wisdom. It is so easy to react to situations with people before we really know what is going on. I could use a reminder once in a while (maybe even more often) that I do need to listen before I react. I need to show others the benefit of the doubt. I need to act in **love** as I have been taught to.

Gracious God, my neighbor is one of your children. My neighbor is a brother or sister in our family. You **love** my neighbor and you **love** me. For this we are grateful. Helps us to remember that even though we might be different from one another we are all your children. Guide me to respect differences and learn to accept and appreciate the ways that we are different. Help me to celebrate the **love** that you offer each and every one of your children. In Christ's name we pray.
AMEN

Thursday

February 29, 2024

1Kings 3:16-28 *This is King Solomon who was called to judge who the mother was when one baby had been smothered while one lived. The real mother said to give the baby whom she **loved** to the other woman so that the baby would live. The other woman said cut the baby in two so the king realized that the real mother **loved** her child and wouldn't see the baby harmed.*

A mother who was willing to give away her child so that that child might live is an extreme example of what sacrifice and **love** are all about. This mother **loved** her child and wanted life for her child. King Solomon was a wise man who saw through lies to determine the truth. **Love** at times can call for sacrifice and people who **love**, are forced to make unfathomable sacrifice for that **love**.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a believer. At the age of fourteen he told his family that he wanted to be a pastor. He was a brilliant man and a gifted pianist, whose talents could have led him to a music career. But he heard the call of God and significantly he answered. Bonhoeffer's convictions held fast as he fought the Nazi party. He helped establish a church (the Confessing Church) after the national church fell under the heel of Hitler and the Nazis. Bonhoeffer was a part of the conspiracy to eliminate Hitler. He did this knowing and accepting that he was breaking the commandments that as a Christian he believed in. Bonhoeffer accepted that what he was doing was against his beliefs but realized that he was willing to face God accepting God's justice.

Bonhoeffer was jailed as being suspected as a participant in "the conspiracy," the attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler. There were occasions that escape was possible for Bonhoeffer, and he was even offered non-prison clothes to wear to facilitate an escape. However, he decided to stay where he was, knowing that if he escaped his family would later suffer and probably be put to death. **Love** indeed is powerful and people who feel **love** for others are willing to sacrifice for them.

Generous God,

You are a **loving** God and for that we say thank you. Lead us to live lives based on **love**. In the Bible and in our daily lives we see examples of your **love**. You call to us to help others and with our hands outstretched we will answer you call.

AMEN

Friday

March 1, 2024

1 John 4:9 this is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

God did indeed send Jesus to show us the way. We are called to live in harmony with others and with the earth. Harmony with the earth has been much more difficult and complicated for we humans, as opposed to plants and animal kingdoms. In the book, "Braiding Sweetgrass" by Robin Kimmerer, she tells of "The Three Sisters". Early Native Americans had learned that what might seem a random arrangement between three different plants, is actually an interwoven biological process that enhances the robustness of the plant community and then is of agricultural benefit to the native people.

The native people learned that by planting a kernel of corn, a bean seed and a squash seed together yielded a wondrous benefit to all three plants. Today we know that another organism is involved as well, a soil bacterium termed *Rhizobium*. The bean seed forms a symbiosis with the bacterium *Rhizobium*, and together the bacterium with the bean root takes the nitrogen out of the atmosphere and makes fertilizer that the plant then uses. The *Rhizobium* can't work in oxygen-containing atmospheres; the plant makes an oxygen-free nodule (a small round body) on the roots that sequesters the growing bacteria.

All three of the plants gain from this relationship. The corn provides a stalk for the bean and squash to grow up on. Seventy-eight percent of our atmosphere is nitrogen but most plants can't use the nitrogen in this form. Kimmerer goes on to say, "but the beauty of the partnership is that each plant does what it does in order to increase its own growth. But as it happens, when the individuals flourish, so does the whole." The people realized that by planting the three different seeds together not only do the individuals survive, but all three flourish. "Being among sisters provides a visible manifestation of what a community can become when its members understand and share their gifts. In reciprocity, we fill our spirits as well as our bellies," concludes Kimmerer. I can't say that the seeds "love" each other but they certainly prosper due to their close and continual relationship. Perhaps we can learn a lesson from this too.

Generous God, working together can lead us to great success. Help us to do just that with our brothers and sisters, but also with our natural surroundings. Let us give thanks for your sending Jesus to live among us so that we might learn from him. AMEN

Mark 10:21 *Jesus looked at him and **loved** him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

Jesus looked at him and what did he see? He saw a man who was wealthy and whom evidently had many material possessions. Jesus automatically **loved** this man because he was a child of God, not because he was wealthy. Too often society judges us for what we have and not who we are. In many ways, success is measured by our bank account, or what car we drive or our address. But we don't take these things with us when we die. We leave it all behind. Even the old religions that filled tombs with riches at some point must have realized that the valuable items were not taken into the afterlife when the dead departed, but they were in fact, left behind.

Every single one of us is one of God's children. When we leave this earth what do we leave? Certainly, all of the stuff we have accumulated is left. But in our relationships that are centered on **love**, that **love** lives on in the hearts of our friends and family. This **love** is in the stories that are told and in memories shared about the departed one. This **love**, lives on to warm the hearts and minds of those who have lost a **loved** one.

Jesus looks at us with **love**. He **loves** us even knowing who and what we are. This is the message that Christ brings into our lives and into the man we read about in Mark. Jesus **loved** the man in his imperfections. Jesus **loves** the good and the bad. Jesus simply **loved** him because he was a child of God's. We are called to do likewise.

Generous God,

We pray that in our shortcomings, you **love** us. Help us to seek a better way to live our lives in the manner which Jesus taught us. Inspire us to look beyond material possessions and acknowledge that we all are your children. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN

Sunday

March 3, 2024

John 14:23 *Jesus replied, “Anyone who **loves** me will obey my teaching. My Father will **love** them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.*

When I lived in Maryland, I had a friend over for lunch and she mentioned that a couple of her friends claimed that they were atheists. At the time I realized that I didn't think that I had any friends who admitted to being an atheist. Perhaps I didn't have the same conversations that led to this admission but it is also possible that all my friends were believers? In any event this led me to interesting conversations with myself. If people don't believe in God, I am not sure what gets them through the dark times of life.

We all need a family and friends who **love** us. I recently was involved in an interesting discussion with a friend during an intermission during the Athens Chamber Singers Christmas concert. My friend asked me if there were specific things that had impacted my life that resulted in be being who I am and my life. At the time I couldn't come up with any specifics. For that I am a bit embarrassed because once I was home it became clear to me what the major influences were.

Being human means that we are imperfect. We all face daily struggles with our behavior, i.e., keeping open to others, sharing talents, listening attentively, and all of the many things that make one a Christian. I am grateful and very thankful that I grew up in a **loving** family. My Mom, Dad and 3 brothers let me know that I was **loved** by the way they treated me with **love**. I also grew up knowing that I was a **beloved** child of God. Not everyone has had the experience that I did. But with that experience I need to keep my hand out to others. Acts of **love** are offering smiles, listening, or offering companionship.

Dear God, thank you for your **love** and patience. Let us acknowledge these gifts with others so that they too will recognize your presence in their everyday lives. Help us to show our **love** for you with the work we do in the service of others. Enlarge our hearts so that we reflect the **love** with which you have given to us. Keep our thoughts ever mindful of your presence. Guide us in our efforts to use our talents to their fullest measure so that we bring a smile to the hearts of our brothers and sisters. Lead us to work that is a reflection of our **love** for you. In all of our efforts let us rejoice and share the good news of you **love**. AMEN

Monday

March 4, 2024

Romans 8:39 *neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the **love** of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Arabella (Kate) Hankey wrote the following song in 1866:

I **love** to tell the story of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His **love**;
I **love** to tell the story, because I know 'tis true,
It satisfies my longings as nothing else would do.

Refrain by William Fischer:

I **love** to tell the story,
'Twill be my theme in glory,
To tell the old, old story
Of Jesus and His **love**.

I **love** to tell the story, more wonderful it seems
Than all the golden fancies of all our golden dreams;
I **love** to tell the story, it did so much for me,
And that is just the reason I tell it now to thee.

I **love** to tell the story, 'tis pleasant to repeat,
What seems each time I tell it more wonderfully sweet;
I **love** to tell the story, for some have never heard
The message of salvation from God's own holy Word.

I **love** to tell the story, for those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest;
And when in scenes of glory I sing the new, new song,
'Twill be the old, old story that I have **loved** so long.

Years ago, we hosted a party in celebration of our son (George) and daughter (Cheryl) graduating from high school and college, respectively. Although both are excellent speakers, Cheryl enjoys speaking before others while George doesn't. At one point in the party, Cheryl gave an excellent thank-you speech to our guests. When it was George's turn he spoke two words – "I concur." My sentiment toward this poem (that I am sure you are familiar with) will follow George's example. I concur!!

Gracious God, for this gift I say thank you. AMEN

Tuesday

March 5, 2024

Matthew 5:43-44. *You have heard that it was said, ‘**Love** your neighbor and hate your enemies. But I tell you, **love** your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*

Nelson Mandela is quoted as saying, “No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to **love**, for **love** comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.” Mandela is certainly a person who had reason to hate. He spent twenty-seven years in prison due to a conviction of conspiring to overthrow the government of South Africa. Thankfully times and people can change and Mandela was finally out of prison. He went on to serve as the president of South Africa from 1994-1999.

Martin Luther King, Jr. also had some meaningful words to add to this discussion. “I have decided to stick with **love**. Hate is too great a burden to bear.” He also said, “It is not enough to say we must not wage war. It is necessary to **love** peace and sacrifice for it.” As we know, King made the ultimate sacrifice of his life for trying to bring respect and justice for people of color.

Desmond Tutu was a South African Anglican bishop and theologian. He was known worldwide for his work as a human-rights and an anti-apartheid activist. He became an Archbishop of Cape Town from 1986 to 1996 and was the first black African to hold this position. Tutu said, “We are made for goodness, **love** and compassion. Our lives are transformed as much as the world when we live with these truths.” On a separate occasion he said, “ We tend to think **love** is a feeling, but it is not. **Love** is an action; **love** is something we do for others.”

Sage words from very wise men who had reason to hate, but definitely chose to **love**. Let us follow their example and put their words into action. **Love** our brothers and sisters as we are all made in the image of God.

Thank you, God, for the lives of Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Desmond Tutu. They are extraordinary examples of putting words into action. Guide us to see individuals when we look at others, seeing our similarities and in doing this we **love**. AMEN

Wednesday

March 6, 2024

Matthew 17:5 *While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I **love**; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"*

Bonhoeffer felt that listening to our brothers and sisters is of utmost importance. The following are three quotes by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, all regarding the topic of "listening". I recently read where someone who worked with and considered himself a friend of Bonhoeffer's described Bonhoeffer as a very kind person. In fact, he said that Bonhoeffer was the kindest man that he knew. Perhaps this is in part due to the importance Bonhoeffer placed on listening.

1. "The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as **love** to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of **love** for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's **love** for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear."

2. "So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking."

3. "Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too."

Let us follow the example that God commands us to do. Listen to the words that God spoke. God was well pleased with Jesus and we are called to listen and to **love** others freely as God **loves** us.

Dear God, you tell us to listen, guide us in this endeavor so that you might say to us: this is my child, whom I **love**. I am well pleased. Listen to this child of mine.
AMEN

Thursday

March 7, 2024

Matthew 19:19 honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Using the internet is at times delightful. There seems to be a site for just about anything. If you have a question, chances are that you will find an answer. It might not be exactly what you actually need but just maybe it will help. As I sit writing this devotional, my husband, Rob is reading the Oconee Police blotter to me. Apparently, it is becoming a dangerous activity to beep your car horn at someone. A sixty-nine-year-old man beeped his car horn (A) at another car (B) because car B was backing up into him. The driver got out of car (B) and proceeded to punch driver A. Driver A ended up falling to the ground with a broken jaw. He was taken to the hospital for treatment. Driver B got back into his car and drove away. The police are now looking for Driver B as the incident was caught on camera. Where was **love**?

Apparently, we have now entered a time where incidents like this happen in Athens. Things like that happen in other places, but not here in Athens or so I thought! Sadly, we seem to have entered into a time where you punch first and then leave rather than seek a peaceful solution. Where was God you might ask? What happened to civil behavior and keeping the state laws? What happened to God's command to **love** our neighbor as ourself? Some of us can't begin to imagine that people are acting out like Driver B. Tragically, some people believe that it is acceptable to punch a stranger, knock him to the ground and leave him there. Excuse my language but what the heck?

It appears that we have sadly entered a time of very bad behavior. Tensions have soared to levels not seen before in my life time. What can we possibly do to have a positive effect on our surroundings? We can start with prayers for guidance, patience and **love** of our neighbors. These challenging times call to us to step up and be stewards of our neighborhoods. We need to **love** our neighbors now more than ever. Neighbors being all of God's children, not simply the people who look like us or live next door but every one of God's children need our **love**. We are called to keep our eyes alert for the people in need. We are called to **love**.

Heavenly God, we need your help. We need your patience and understanding. We need to find a way to walk your path. We need your **love**. AMEN

Friday

March 8,2024

Mark 12:30 *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'*

I have a question and thankfully, the website gotquestions.com has some answers. This verse is a bit overwhelming as it calls for a **love** that seems bigger than anything I could do. This site offers the opinion that a **love** this great is beyond a human being's abilities. At some point in the day, I would fall short and I imagine that others would too. God is aware of our limitations and thankfully sent Jesus to guide us through our struggles. Jesus accepted our sins and with him we have been "cleansed," and freed from those sins with the sacrament of Holy Communion.

As we age, we hopefully have faced times of struggle in the knowledge that we aren't alone but that God is with us. We have faced times of challenge where our hearts are fragile and our spirit feels depleted. Many of us have faced physical ailments that seem insurmountable. We have lost people who we held dear in our hearts. With the knowledge that God stands beside us we are able to get through those times. With life's experiences we hopefully mature to become more open to **love** more fully and with deeper commitment.

gotanswers.com tells us, "Those who pursue God and His righteousness, who take seriously the command to **love** Him above all else, are those who are consumed with the things of God. They are eager to study God's Word, eager to pray, eager to obey and honor God in all things, and eager to share Jesus Christ with others. It is through these spiritual disciplines that the **love** for God grows and matures to the glory of God."

Gracious God, assist our efforts to be "eager" Christians. Give us the strength, courage and abilities to pursue a close relationship with you. You are our hope for a world – a world more just and committed to following your commandments. Nurture our ability to **love** so that we will **love** you with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind and with all of the strength we have. In the name of our savior, Jesus, we pray.

AMEN

Saturday

March 9, 2024

Mark 12:31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

In 1982 Lee Bernstein wrote lyrics to the tune of "This Old Man". The song was sung by a purple dinosaur named Barney. This song became the theme song of the dinosaur and the television show. Soon mothers, dads, and many preschoolers were singing this song. The lyrics are simple but carry a significant message.

I **love** you
You **love** me
We're a happy family
With a great big hug
And a kiss from me to you
Won't you say you **love** me too?

I **love** you
You **love** me
We're best friends like friends should be
With a great big hug
And a kiss from me to you
Won't you say you **love** me too?

Simply singing this song brings a smile to my face. Many memories pop up of days gone by when my children were young. This song has a very simple message. We are being called to **love**. We are part of a family which is based on **love**. We embrace others as Jesus called us to do.

Dear God, let us sing this song with our hearts full of your **love**. When we start to complicate your message bring us back to these straight forward words so that we might go forward in **love**. AMEN

Sunday

March 10, 2024

*Mark 12:33 To **love** him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to **love** your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”*

My Heart

Our God
fondness devotion
heart tenderness attachment joyful
faithful friend throughout our lifetime
promise warmth intimacy endearment value
eternal adoration worship passion caring cherish
treasure value respect affection ardor gift admire
adore adulate steadfast affirmation words give
giving & receiving **love** gives you strength
loving someone gives you strength
physical touch hugs gentle
quality time together
acts of service
Jesus Christ
My Savior
My Lord
God

Dear God, my heart is full with **love**. Thank you. Give me the strength to share this **love** with my brothers and sisters. AMEN

Monday

March 11, 2024

Luke 3:22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I **love**; with you I am well pleased.”

In the song “Wings of a Dove” by Ferlin Husky we are able to see the beauty of the dove flying down out of the sky. These lyrics are stunning in their portrayal of God’s pronouncement.

On the wings of a snow-white dove
He sends His pure sweet **love**
A sign from above (sign from above)
On the wings of a dove (wings of a dove)
When troubles surround us
When evils come
The body grows weak (body grows weak)
The spirit grows numb (spirit grows numb)
When these things beset us
He doesn't forget us
He sends down His **love** (sends down His **love**)
On the wings of a dove (wings of a dove)
On the wings of a snow-white dove
He sends His pure sweet **love**
A sign from above (sign from above)
On the wings of a dove (wings of a dove)
When Noah had drifted
On the flood many days
He searched for land (he searched for land)
In various ways (various ways)
Troubles, he had some
But wasn't forgotten
He sent him His **love** (sent him His **love**)
On the wings of a dove (wings of a dove)
On the wings of a snow-white dove
He sends His pure sweet **love**
A sign from above (sign from above)
On the wings of a dove (wings of a dove)

Generous God, thank you for giving talents to your sons and daughters who write songs that describe the beauty of your **love** for us. Let us continue to share our voices raised in song to your glory. AMEN

Tuesday

March 12, 2024

Luke 6:22 *“But to you who are listening I say: **Love** your enemies, do good to those who hate you,*

Even before WWII broke out, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was aware of exactly what long-term objectives were brewing in Germany. He witnessed the dismantling of the Lutheran church, was made aware of the horrors of the “camps” people were being sent to and he still was able to fight against the causes of this destruction. His brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi worked for the government. Hans had access to photographs and information of what was happening to people considered to be undesirable to the state and shared this information with Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer and Dohnanyi became part of the conspiracy to rid Germany of Hitler. This was certainly a struggle for Bonhoeffer as he lived his life following his **love** of God and Christ and the commandments that God had given us.

Bonhoeffer held strong convictions when he wrote, “**Love** asks nothing in return, but seeks those who need it. And who needs our **love** more than those who are consumed with hatred and are utterly devoid of **love**.” There were many people who opposed what was happening but how were they to assist? Also, many people didn’t realize the extent of evil that was being carried out, and if they asked questions they too would disappear.

On my first trip to Germany in 1987, Rob and I attended a scientific conference. The spouses were taken on a walk through the beautiful university town of Gottingen. When we passed through one neighborhood, the wife of the meeting organizer told us that we were walking through what had been the Jewish neighborhood before the war. She said “one morning the people woke-up and discovered that all of the Jewish population had moved to work in a camp.” She explained that she had been a young girl at the time so didn’t question this.

The group became very quiet. Imagine living in a time where hundreds of people disappear overnight. In a time when your neighbor might turn you in to the police for asking questions. When the whole world seemed to be fighting and you were frightened every day, what would you do? Would you pray for your enemy? Would you offer them **love**?

Loving God, you have given us the ability to **love**. We pray we use that ability to **love** all, family, friends, and even enemies. AMEN

Wednesday

March 13, 2024

John 3:19 *This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people **loved** darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.*

Continuing with another of Bonhoeffer's quotes, "Christian **love** draws no distinction between one enemy and another, except that the more bitter our enemy's hatred, the greater his need of **love**. Be his enmity political or religious, he has nothing to expect from a follower of Jesus but unqualified **love**. In such **love** there is not inner discord between the private person and official capacity. In both we are disciples of Christ, or we are not Christians at all." These are powerful words that Bonhoeffer believed until his death.

Remember Bonhoeffer was writing these words from a cold, damp prison cell while in isolation. Expanding on the power of **love** for our enemies Bonhoeffer wrote, "The **love** for our enemies takes us along the way of the cross and into fellowship with the Crucified. The more we are driven along this road, the more certain is the victory of **love** over the enemy's hatred. For then it is not the disciple's own **love**, but the **love** of Jesus Christ alone, who for the sake of his enemies went to the cross and prayed for them as he hung there." Bonhoeffer didn't just write these words and contemplate them alone; he lived them by befriending the Nazi prison guards and prayed for their salvation. In spite of his miserable situation Bonhoeffer remained steadfast in his **love** of Jesus Christ.

The Bonhoeffer family, like many other German, European, American and all of the countries that were fighting this war, suffered greatly. Dietrich and a brother were killed as were two of Dietrich's brothers-in-law. The surviving family did not give up their faith but continued on. Thankfully the war ended and for a few short years there was peace.

Forgiving God,

When we face the most severe challenges possible let us remember the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer so that we remain resilient in your hope and **love**. We then can conquer evil and sustain all challenges.

AMEN

Thursday

March 14, 2024

John 8:42 *Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would **love** me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me.*

My Friend Bonhoeffer

Hours spent reading his words
Examining their significance
Sharing thoughts and moments
Fundamental beliefs solidify
Edification beyond imagination
Precious gifts shared by him
A man I have never met
Has become a very dear friend.

Bonhoeffer strikes so many cords with me. It is uncanny how clearly his works speak directly to me, and oftentimes just at the time I need to hear them. Bonhoeffer's writings become a fulfillment of God's presence and **love** for me in my life. I need to hear the words that Bonhoeffer wrote. Bonhoeffer has brought me a clearer understanding of others and my personal role in my church community. It is imperative that I strive to encourage others' relationship with God. Practically speaking I need to listen to what others have to say. When I share my talents with the community, I am a closer part of the community. My goal has to be one where my belonging benefits the community.

Gracious God,

Thank you for the time, talents and brilliance that led to the building of the printing press. With this machine, Martin Luther was able to impact the whole of Europe and later the world. Thank you for inspiring Dietrich Bonhoeffer to write and share his theology. These men continue to inspire people today and for that we are blessed. Thank you.

AMEN

Friday

March 15, 2024

*Luke 7:47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great **love** has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little **loves** little.”*

Consider the following story of how people can get lost, even under the best of circumstances.

“I forgive you.” Words uttered sincerely that were meant to be a balm, a pacifier, perhaps an olive branch of peace brought the woman up short. She heard the words but had a single moment of _____ what? This woman was at a loss for words or even a thought. “Before I left,” the man continued, “I would have tried to make changes or work toward making improvements.” His words were sincerely given and surely meant to bring peace. But they cut the woman to the quick.

Forgiveness shouldn’t cause pain but these words added burden to her already flagging self. Perhaps she had created the very wilderness in which she had found herself wandering. But she had tried her hardest, she had really done her best, what more could she do? When she heard complaints from this or that person, she worked to correct the issue. She was deliberate in her efforts to make changes that would correct the problems. But resistance was the reaction of the majority.

Her creativity was given free reign and occasionally reached high into inspiration. The group achieved some glorious moments of unexpected delight. But then too many negatives stacked up until she no longer seemed beneficial. She began to falter, to despair and soon she felt parched, dried up.

She didn’t want to leave but she could no longer stay --- thus she began to wander. For her leaving, this man whom she called friend, “forgave her”. He still had no knowledge of what had happened, and never would. Discretion is important when the truth doesn’t assist or improve the situation.... But where would she find peace? Where would she find **love** and understanding?

Precious God,

We face challenges that sometimes feel overwhelming. Remind us gently that you are always by our side. Thank you for your **love** and care and keep our ears open to hear and accept the truth. AMEN

Saturday

March 16, 2024

Luke 11:43 *“Woe to you Pharisees, because you **love** the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.*

The River of Life

The river flows widely and deeply
Lay our crowns down at the source
Throw off our sins and misdeeds
Our insecurities and our frailties
We will be reborn in the water
Refreshed we have found peace
Our spirits are clean and expansive.

The beasts taunt us from the riverbank
They no longer have power to thwart us
The Alpha and Omega has saved and redeemed us
With steadfast, patient **love** Jesus waits to answer.
Jesus has and will forever reign in **love** before us
To continue in **love** long after we have departed
Turned to dust and gone on to be joined in eternity.

There are times when we want the best seats. We want to be close to what is going on. We feel better about ourselves when we look behind us and see a crowd. But once we are in that river of life, our choice has been made. Our relationship with Jesus is personal. He is our life preserver. He is with us with each and every step. The **love** of Jesus is beyond our comprehension. It is indeed a precious gift.

Precious God, thank you. AMEN

Sunday

March 17, 2024

Luke 20:46 *“Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and **love** to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.*

Listen please listen

I hear God’s voice speak to me.

God’s voice is in the songs that we sing,

God’s voice is in the sounds of nature.

God’s voice is heard when you offer **love**.

God’s voice is heard when you offer kindness.

Listen please listen,

God speaks to you and God speaks to me.

We just. Have to listen, please listen.

Over and over, God tries to speak

But we are rushing and do not hear.

How many times must God tell us?

Love is to be shared with all humankind.

Over and over God tells us.

Love is a gift meant for God’s children.

Respect one another in gentle **love**.

And offer prayer for all.

Not for God’s attention but for our redemption.

When we hold out our hand to offer help

We become an instrument of God.

When we pray together, we can defeat our problems.

God’s presence is found in us.

We are God’s gift to each other when we do God’s work.

We can answer each other’s prayers

Doing the work of God inspires others to do God’s work.

When we listen to ourselves in prayer

We will hear the voice of God and know that God is here.

Patient God, hear our prayers. Thank you for your patience and **love**. AMEN

Monday

March 18, 2024

John 8:42 *Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would **love** me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me.*

Martin Luther King is one of my heroes. Sadly, I only became familiar with his writings once he was gone and I was an adult. Growing up when I did, I would see him on the news but as a young junior high student I wasn't in tune with his message. Unfortunately, I didn't pay attention or listen to what he had to say. Like so many others I was ignorant of what many people experienced in our cities and throughout the land.

Our junior high school was integrated and it seemed to me, perhaps naively, that we all got along. I fervently hoped that this was true for all of the students in our school. Tragically when we were getting ready to graduate (year 1968) and to go to high school, King was assassinated in what seemed a too often occurrence. First, we lost a president in 1963, then Dr. King and shortly thereafter Bobby Kennedy. Our school did their best to keep order but life seemed out of control. We did have a memorial event for Dr. King but these events in our country seemed incomprehensible to me.

Decades later I came across a quote of Dr. King's that struck a chord within me. From there my interest in his writings increased and I found more of his writings that were significant and spoke to me. The following quotes have profound meaning and significant value to our Lenten journey. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only **love** can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only **love** can do that," wrote King. Also, he wrote that "**Love** is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend." How sad it is that a man of peace, Martin Luther King, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, paid the ultimate price - that of their lives to spread the **love** of Christ.

Gracious God,

Sadly, we haven't learned our lesson to live and **love** all of your children. Throughout our history we fall short. We have lost too many of your children due to careless and bad behavior. Please open our hearts to your message so that we might live our lives according to your will and ways. In this we pray. AMEN

Tuesday

March 19, 2024

John 15:9 "As the Father has **loved** me, so have I **loved** you. Now remain in my **love**."

I am: An extension of God's **love**
 A product of God's creativity
 An ever-evolving person.

Always: God **loves** me
 While I struggle against the **love**
 Too often find that **love** difficult to accept.

(in) God's **love**: Chains forged of the strongest metal
 To bind me ever to God's side
 Each link forged with the blood of Christ.

We are: Each a child of God
 Created by God as an amplification of God's **love**
 Hence, we are all **loved** and held close.

(in) God's **love**: Never falters when we strain
 Against the swelling tide of **love**
 Learn to be obedient to the will of God.

Dear God,

I pray that with hard work, I will become the person whom you intend me to be. My actions will reflect your **love**. My faith is the bedrock of my life from which all of my actions arise. When I am kind, I am doing your work. When I look upon the face of a stranger, I will strive to see the face of Jesus. He will help to guide me to offer help for those in need. My "good works" are God's "good works". My faith is a gift from you, and you meant me to share any and all gifts with all of your people. Let me be generous to others and share my faith and my **love**. When you call out "is anybody listening?" let me answer truthfully "I am listening Lord. Here I am ready to do your will." AMEN

Wednesday

March 20, 2024

Romans 5:5 *And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

Once again, I searched for in-depth information on a subject. The subject matter being the Holy Spirit. According to on-line information, I am able to provide specifics in what are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. According to the website these gifts are first mentioned in the book of Isaiah. The gifts are: understanding, wisdom, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord. I firmly believe that many coincidences are not coincidences at all. In fact, I wrote an entire devotional based on my feeling that what some people would call a coincidence, I would call the action of the Holy Spirit.

My hands were covered in soapy water while I was washing a piece of glassware in the laboratory that I worked in at UGA. A young man walked up to me and extended his hand to shake mine when he noticed my problem. This young man was someone you would never forget once you met him. He quickly extended his elbow and said, "How about if we bump elbows?" I was immediately charmed by his friendly manner. After our initial meeting, I would spot him on campus and his face always radiated the same joy. The last time I heard from Joe it was via e-mail. He had sent a request for prayers and then followed this up with a brief journal from his latest mission trip to Haiti.

Joe worked in our laboratory his senior year. He then went on to medical school. Joe devoted his life to doing service for the poor in the name of Jesus Christ. He made the decision that his most effective means to help the poor would be for him to become a medical doctor. All of his breaks from school were spent doing mission work. In his journal his simple message was "receive the Father's **love** and give it away." This gift of God's **love** was so enormous and so precious that it must be shared. To hoard this gift, or ignore it was not acceptable. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were evident within Joe.

Hopefully we have all come to meet and know someone like Joe, someone who can inspire us to go beyond our perceived limitations. When we are open to God's word, we will want to share our knowledge. **Love** isn't something to be kept as a secret buried deep within us, but to be fully appreciated it must be right out there for all of see and feel.

Dear God, thank you for putting people in our lives that inspire us. AMEN

Thursday

March 21, 2024

John 14:28 *“You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you **loved** me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.*

The first significant person that I lost was my father. It happened at the end of September in 1977, days before Rob and I were to move from Wisconsin to Oregon. We would be leaving our family thousands of miles away. My Dad was the best dad I could have had. He encouraged me, was proud of me and let me know every day of my life that he **loved** me. My heart was broken. How could I ever go on without him? I felt lost. I imagine that this loss was similar to how the disciples felt when Jesus was crucified.

Before he left, Jesus let the disciples know that they wouldn't be alone. He promised that they would have the Holy Spirit with them to guide them. Jesus would be joining his father in heaven and the disciples should be glad of this. It took me a long time to come to this realization for my father. I knew my dad would be joining his parents and his brothers, who had died as children, in Heaven. This was very hard to appreciate at the time. Attending worship was something that I did with my dad. After his death, my attending services was bittersweet. I felt very close to my dad while I worshipped, so I especially missed him while at worship.

With Rob's, my brothers' and my mom's support, I was able to smile again. I realized and felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was with me to guide my life. **Love** was alive in me and I was ready to reach out to others in their time of need. God's **love** soothed my soul when I knew that my dad was there in Heaven waiting for me. Thankfully God's **love** fills our hearts.

Merciful God,

Life can be so very sweet and an easy gift to receive. But there are struggles that we all face at times. Help our faith to grow so that we can truly be living expressions of your **love**. Help us to live our lives in obedience to your will. My faith is a gift from you, and this gift is meant to be shared. When you call out “is anybody listening?” Let me answer truthfully, “I am listening Lord. Here I am ready to do your will.” AMEN

Friday

March 22, 2024

John 15:9 "As the Father has **loved** me, so have I **loved** you. Now remain in my **love**

Have you ever known someone in whom God's **love** burns so brightly that it almost causes you to blink? This love shines radiantly causing your own heart to warm. I have had that pleasure while living in Madison, Wisconsin. Rob and I worshipped at Luther Memorial Church. Stephen Bremer was the senior pastor. Although I never got to know him personally, I learned a great deal from him and about him simply attending his worship services and listening to his sermons.

Pastor Bremer was from the state of Washington and grew up in a family that devoted their careers to the church. One of his brothers was a fellow pastor while the other was a music director of a church. Pastor Bremer's family came to Madison to participate in and celebrate his 25th Ordination Anniversary. It was obvious that the family was both based on and surrounded with **love**.

I'm not sure if Pastor Bremer had been blessed from birth or if he consciously accepted and developed this gift but he radiated joy. Every hymn that was sung, he sang with gusto. His sermons were brilliant. God's **love** was visible in Pastor Bremer. One couldn't help but be inspired by his words. He spoke each and every word secure in the knowledge that **love** was the foundation of his service to God and the church.

Listening to one of Pastor Bremer's sermons was akin to having an ember fanned. It was at these times when our Christianity felt like a living part of our body. Our hearts would be filled with a **loving** God, the **loving** God that Pastor Bremer spoke so eloquently of. As his joy poured out from his soul, he ignited his congregation to be the conduit of God's **love** into the community. The **love** that Pastor Bremer displayed and shared within his congregation fostered the congregation to share that **love** with others. The joy we found in **loving** God was contagious.

Dear God, thank you for the gift of Stephen Bremer. His work inspired many people. He was a living example of the joy that you bring to people. Help us to recognize these people who are living examples of your **love**. Let us fully accept your **love** and be so moved that we live our lives as a testament of this **love**. Help us to develop that feeling of joy within ourselves so that we can be a light and inspiration to others. AMEN

Saturday

March 23, 2024

John 14:21 *Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who **loves** me. the one who **loves** me will be **loved** by my Father, and I too will **love** them and show myself to them.*

Jesus **loves** me
Every day of my life
Jesus **loves** me.

My hand held out before me
I feel the **love** of Jesus
With each hug or touch shared.

I see beauty in nature
I perceive it in forms
Pleasing to the eye.

Jesus **loves** me
Every day of my life
Jesus **loves** me.

Jesus **loves** me
Every day of my life
Jesus **loves** me.

The fragrance of **love** so sweet
It perfumes the air
Triggering memories of bliss.

I hear it in melodies
Whether human voices
Or sounds of nature ringing.

Jesus **loves** me
Every day of my life
Jesus **loves** me.

Jesus **loves** me
Every day of my life
Jesus **loves** me.

His message is powerful
A reply is essential
How I respond is key.

I taste the **love**
When I partake of food
Gifts given to nourish my body.

Jesus **loves** me
Every day of my life
Jesus **loves** me.

Jesus **loves** me
Every day of my life
Jesus **loves** me.

I listen to his voice
I have felt his love
Each propels me to actions.

Jesus **loves** me
Every day of my life
Jesus **loves** me. AMEN

John 13:1 *It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having **loved** his own who were in the world, he **loved** them to the end.*

Time to Party

It's time to gather the palms
Spread them to make a pathway
Our future couldn't be brighter
Jesus, our redeemer has come.

Spread the palms before him
See him riding the borrowed colt
Riding into the city triumphantly
Jesus, our savior has come.

We greet him with shouts of joy
Laughter ringing, all of us singing
Jesus has healed our bodies and spirits
Jesus, our friend has come.

Shout his name into the future
Engrave his name onto our hearts
Feel his **love** pour out upon us
Jesus, the **beloved** has come.

Today we celebrate his arrival
Our hearts filled with laughter
The Son shines radiantly
Jesus, our savior has come.

Dear God, the gift of your son, Jesus Christ is an awesome gift for us. Please let us be worthy in your eyes of the sacrifice that you made and make for us. Help us to evolve into caring and **loving** people who live our lives following the example of Jesus Christ. AMEN

Monday

March 25, 2024

1 John 3:18 *Dear children, let us not **love** with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

In 1860 Anna Bartlett Warner wrote a poem for children. The words are very familiar.

Jesus **loves** me—this I know,
For the Bible tells me so:
Little ones to him belong,—
They are weak, but he is strong.

Jesus **loves** me—he who died
Heaven's gate to open wide;
He will wash away my sin,
Let his little child come in.

Jesus **loves** me—**loves** me still,
Though I'm very weak and ill;
From his shining throne on high,
Comes to watch me where I lie.

Jesus **loves** me—he will stay
Close beside me all the way.
Then his little child will take
Up to heaven for his dear sake

In 1862 William Batchelder Bradbury added music.

It is no exaggeration to say that most people today know this song. In 1943 our country was at war. In the Solomon Islands a PT boat (109) was rammed and sank. This boat held someone who became a President of the United States in 1961 (John F Kennedy). Native islanders came to the rescue. The marines, along with native islanders, Eroni Kumana and Biuka Gasa who had learned the song above from missionaries, together sang “Jesus **Loves** Me” during the rescue. It is no leap of faith to conclude that the familiarity of the words and the meaning they conveyed brought comfort to the survivors. Perhaps they were able to hum or even sing along with their rescuers.

Loving God,

You are with us in times of need. You are with us in our despair. For your presence in our lives and the gift of your love we say thank you. Guide us to share this **love** with our neighbors so that all might know your **love**. AMEN

Tuesday

March 26, 2024

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Help me, Jesus,
alone, I sit alone
the cold seeps into my soul
a lone tear escapes my eye
to track down my cheek.

“Come close,” I beckon,
for I am in need of comfort
your presence is light that warms
my body and soul.

Your touch illuminates the darkness,
it is a balm to my spirit.
You give me comfort and offer peace,
for this I am grateful.

We are not meant to stand alone
as a solitary shadow,
but as a cluster, held together
in your **love** and grace.
Working together in your **love**.

Patient God,

We have the advantage of knowing that the son will rise in the morning. But there are so many times in life when we worry and are anxious about the future. Help us to feel your strength and know that your **love** never wavers. We are your children and so are blessed. Keep us steadfast in our work to do your will. AMEN

Wednesday

March 27, 2024

1 Corinthians 2:9 *However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"— the things God has prepared for those who **love** him—*

Charles Wesley in 1747 wrote the following hymn. It speaks of the **love** God meant for us.

1 **Love** divine, all **loves** excelling,
joy of heav'n to earth come down,
fix in us Thy humble dwelling;
all Thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded **love** Thou art;
visit us with Thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.

2 Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast!
Let us all in Thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away our **love** of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

3 Come, Almighty to deliver;
let us all Thy life receive;
suddenly return and never,
nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve Thee as Thy hosts above;
pray, and praise Thee without
ceasing,
glory in Thy perfect **love**.

4 Finish then, Thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see Thy great salvation
perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav'n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before Thee,
lost in wonder, **love**, and praise.

Gracious God, help us to take these words to heart. Let us accept them and joyously live the life you want for us. Let your **love** shine brightly within me.
AMEN

John 13:1 *It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having **loved** his own who were in the world, he **loved** them to the end.*

What could be better than having a nice meal with a group of your closest friends? But what if you knew that this meal would be your last? What if you knew one in this group would sell you out for thirty pieces of silver? What if you knew your days were numbered? What if you knew one of these men would deny knowing you? What if you knew that you were likely to be hung on a cross? What would you do? Would you **love** this group of men?

The disciples should be whom we see as examples of the **love** that Christ gives to us. They were by no means a perfect group of perfect people. They squabbled, fought for placement within the group of disciples and denied Christ, but Christ **loved** them nonetheless. This group of regular people was the very group of people, who Christ chose to live with, dine with and significantly to **love**.

This example of Christ's **love** should really give us hope for ourselves as being Christ's disciples. As the disciples of Christ, we should be easy to find in a crowd. We should be a light for others to follow exemplifying God's **love**.

God wants our **love** and obedience. It is only in obedience to God's word where we are enabled to be truly free to be God's people. But the cost is high, it is the cost of our life. When we accept the gift of God's grace and **love**, we then reciprocate with the gift of our **love** to God, sharing this **love** to all of God's people.

Gracious God,

Give us the strength to face tomorrow. AMEN

Good Friday

March 29, 2024

Luke 16:14 *The Pharisees, who **loved** money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus*

Life from Dust

The drowning malaise of everyday tedium
Resulting in a sad, lonely life reduced to a minimal crust
Over time the lack of stimulation resulted in a dense barrier
That barrier formed around the heart - hardening
Joy had long ago evaporated leaving a vacuum
Persisting in a dusty footprint left behind
This is the land of isolation where I find myself adrift.
Jesus, you have called to me and I resisted.

The very walls that I had constructed in a need to protect
My tender underbelly, keeps me apart from fellow beings.
For the community of humanity to be successful
It has to be made of stalwart individuals with belief
Who by nature are mildly successful as a specific unit
But thrive when these units blend their talents together.
Culminating when the parts far exceed expectations
When there is fusion and they become a whole effort
Conscious thought and action are required to remain viable.

Jesus, your **love** pierced the hard shell of my heart.
I am yours. I am yours. Stay beside me forever. Stay. Forever.

Loving God,

Jesus died on the cross and with his death we know despair. He sought to **love** us and we came up short. Help us while we await his return. Help us to live by the lessons he taught us. Help us to **love** others as you have tried so hard to teach us. Help us to be the people you made us to be. AMEN

Saturday

March 30, 2024

1 John 4:10 *This is love; not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

I was at a church related “meet and greet” many years ago. Even after thirty-nine years I clearly remember our first activity. The pastor introduced himself and then asked us to close our eyes and take a deep breath and release it. He then asked us to keep our eyes closed and raise our hands when we thought one minute had passed. At that time, we could open our eyes. Everyone in our group had their hands raised within twenty-five seconds. That one minute seemed to last much longer than anyone thought. It seems that whenever we have to wait for anything time seems to drag on and on and on.

On this Saturday, we know what Sunday brings. But we still have to wait and wait some more. Hopefully, our patience will hold. Waiting is difficult at most times. There are times when I should find enjoyment in an activity while I am participating in or watching a particular activity, i.e. a sporting event. But in truth, I prefer knowing the result or the end of a story at the start. Not only are we waiting, but Jesus waited for his resurrection. As adults we know what and who Sunday brings. But for today we can pray that Jesus can feel our **love** and devotion that we feel for him. We wait and we pray for Christ’s resurrection.

Gracious God,

Thank you for your patience while we wait. We wait to see the sun and feel the light of a new day. Our efforts frequently fall short. We try to be patient but waiting can be such a challenge. Help us, please help us. We need to see the light of a new day. AMEN

1 John 4:8 Whoever does not **love** does not know **God**, because **God** is **love**.

There is no other feeling that can compare to **love**. It was through and in **love** that Jesus sacrificed his life for us. However strong and capable we might feel ourselves to be, human beings need **love**. Not only to we need to be **loved**, we need to **love**.

Let us rejoice and say halleluiah! Jesus Christ has risen today!! Halleluiah!! **Love** has triumph over hatred. Jesus stands by our side and we have a new beginning. Let us begin this new year with a commitment to **love** our brothers and sisters. Let our actions reflect **love**. May we lead the way so that others know by our actions that we are God's children.

Today is a new day.
The sun shines brightly
Clouds dance gently by
Love is shining in the air
Joy sparks in abundance
Hearts know God's **love**.
Hands held out to comfort
Eyes are open to see you
Ears open to hear the message
Feet walk forward to your side
Today is a new beginning
We all are your children
Love is here
Love is there
Thank you, God
Love is everywhere.
Help us sustain & multiply **love**.

Heavenly God,

It is with joy that we celebrate the risen Lord. Thank you for your **love**, thank you for the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. Thank you for not giving up on us. Let us rejoice and say Halleluiah! Christ has risen, he has risen indeed. Halleluiah.
AMEN

p.s. I was amazed when I read the following in the book, “Braiding Sweetgrass,” “For me, writing is an act of reciprocity with the world; it is what I can give back in return for everything that has been given to me.” This describes perfectly my hope that through writing and then sharing what I write with others I am fulfilling my duty and pledge to God (who has been so abundantly generous to me). I am called, compelled to action to reciprocate with God for every blessing that I have received. Also, I would like to think that I learned a few answers to the question Tina Turner asks in her 1984 song. What does **love** got to do with it? Our lives should start and finish in **love**. God gives his **love** to us and we in turn share that **love** with others – family, friends, strangers, all of God’s children. Love has everything to do with it.

What started as my gift of writing my beliefs to my children has grown into sharing my thoughts and beliefs with others outside of my family, to my church families and friends. Before I experienced the weekend retreats in Maryland with my church family, led by Pastor Glenn Ludwig, I didn’t share my faith outside of the church. On the drive up to Camp Newakwa I began to share my faith with my good friend, Sue Beck. During these weekends, I also learned to be open and share my thoughts and insights with the church family members that attended to retreat. After our move to Georgia, Pastor Norbert Hahn introduced us to “small group” ministry, which became a life changer for me. Once trained, I felt the call to facilitate groups to study writings from Bonhoeffer and Victor Frankl. From there I realized that it was safe to discuss private thoughts and beliefs with others in our community. I like to think that the devotionals I write are expressions of the **love** I have in my heart for those who read them. Your reading what I write is a precious gift to me. It is a gift beyond measure, so I thank you.

I would be remis if I don’t include a thank you to my proofreaders, Charlotte and Rob. They spend time going through what I write carefully to find any errors. Also, they ask questions and share thoughts and insights that are meaningful to me.

With **love**,

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