



FIRST  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
SPARTANBURG

*this way forward*

## A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF JESUS: THE SUN STILL SHINES

John 15:9-17

May 6, 2018

Dr. Thomas E. Evans

We have known since we were children, that Jesus “loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so!” We know this love is real because of the sacrifice Jesus endured. But we know very little about the character of this love.

Like the beauty of a flower, each love is unique. A flower may be a bold red color like a Rose or the rich violet of a Dahlia lilac with huge dinner-plate blossoms.

It may come once a century, like the Queen of the Andes that does not bloom until it is eighty years old. But the wait is worth it. The bloom can grow to 30 feet with up to 30,000 flowers!

In this world, we see many different types of love that joins two as one in wedded bliss. Sometimes, that love blooms in an instant – love at first sight, they call it. That is what happened to me when I saw Wendy for the first time. I was struck dumb! Other times, two people know each other literally for decades but the love blooms later. Then there are those special gifts of the second love. After 40, 50 years of marriage one partner passes and loneliness sets in. But the ever-surprising God touches their hearts and love is born anew.

A few years ago, we had a wedding here of two people who met in an assisted living center in their 80's. Like a school boy, he spotted her across the room in the dining hall and got up the nerve to sit next to her and the rest is history.

It is never too late for love to bloom and, like the Queen of the Andes, it is extra special when it blossoms.

So, if you were to ask yourself “What kind of love is that of a God for his creation?” finding a parallel is not so easy. We might think it would be akin to an artist for their painting or a clockmaker for their clock. A source of pride and concomitant

desire to preserve and enjoy their work for all the effort put forth.

Yes, of course, it is like a parent's love for their child. But it is too easy to presume we understand what this means, for that love is derived from divine love of the Father for the Son, not the archetype.

Fortunately, because Jesus reveals a great deal of his intimate thoughts in John, we have a strong foundation on which to explore the type of love God has for us.

Today's passage offers us dramatic insight into precisely what it means to be a part of God's family. We know we are loved by God but here we learn how. In verse nine, “As the father has loved me so I have loved you.”

This means we can know God's love for us by looking at how God the Father loves the Son. The depths of this truth are beyond our comprehension, for it is at the very heart of God's sublime being.

John tells us “God is love.” That is different than saying God loves. We love, but we also hate, sleep, work, and so on. Love is something we sometimes do.

But God *is* love.

Every thought that God has, every action God takes, every moment since forever, without fail, God loves. If we were to ask what God is made of, like a recipe, it is one ingredient – love.

To say that Jesus loves us as God has loved the Son, is not a trifling thought. It is an idea as grand as eternity.

Saint Augustine, that 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian from Africa, spent some time exploring the love within the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He called them the Lover, Love, and the Beloved.

God is the Lover. The one who has loved the Son since eternity. The Holy Spirit is the love itself. The love that goes from the Father to the Son. Jesus is the beloved, the recipient of the eternally pouring-forth love of the Father. This is not something Augustine thought of off the top of his head. John tells us God so loved the world. In John, God declares to Jesus, "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

It is in the Father's very nature to constantly and perpetually pour forth this love to the Son. So, if Jesus loves us as the Father loves him, that makes us the Beloved.

This means that every moment of every day Jesus' love is raining down upon us through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. The first characteristic of Jesus' love for us is its constancy and unswerving nature. The Old Testament describes it as God's steadfast love. Thus, even when Jesus had a mission like proclaiming the gospel or saving the world, he paused in the middle, stopped what he was doing, and healed the sick or consoled the outcast.

Jesus would not let an immediate task get in the way of sharing his love. If you remember nothing else from this sermon remember this: *It is always the right time to love.*

God's love is something like the warmth of the Sun. It constantly warms the earth with its rays, even when we don't see it at nighttime.

There are times in our life when God's love appears absent. These are the dark times of life, when the sun is on the other side of our world.

In such a moment, the great, Biblical judge Gideon said, "If the Lord is really with us... where are all His wonderful deeds like the ones our fathers recounted to us?" But in the reality of these times it is not the absence of God's love we are experiencing. Instead, it is the absence of earthly things, not heavenly things.

Six months ago, on a Saturday night, I had the great joy to perform Sally Breeden's wedding.

About 30 minutes before the wedding I received a phone call from Myrtle Beach where my father lived. It was the hospital across the street from my father's house. He was confused and agitated. He could not name his children. He did not know his address.

I thought this call might come someday. My father's memory had been getting worse over the past few years. At first, I panicked. I was getting ready to jump in the car and drive to Myrtle Beach right then and there. I was going to call Pastor Joanne and ask her to fill in at the wedding. But I paused; I took a deep breath. The hospital said they could keep him for the next several hours. Physically, he was fine. But my father, whose mind was like a steel trap that could hold seven different languages in it, who graduated magna cum laude from Stanford, earned his Masters of Divinity from Princeton and his Doctorate from University in Basel, Switzerland, that mind existed no longer.

I performed the wedding and made my way in the darkness of night, a four-hour journey, to get my father. Over the past several years, I had tried to convince him to move to Spartanburg, with no success whatsoever. He had no interest in making such a move, but that evening, with each passing hour of driving, I became more determined to convince him. When I finally arrived, the hospital was right, he was extremely confused. He didn't know my name or my brothers' names. He kept asking how much money was in the bank – again and again and again.

When I took him to the doctor's office the next day, the doctor fired off one question after the next to my father and my father could not field a single one of them. Where do you live? How old are you? Where were you born? How many children do you have? What are their names?

And so, my father moved in with us.

It was a very dark time. I could not see God's love. I did not feel his care. It was a very hard time. But over the course of weeks and months, I began

to see, even in the darkness, how God's love was pouring forth.

My father, like many men of his generation, never shared anything personal. He was always a kind father, but the only feelings we shared were the joy of sinking a 30-foot putt and the pain of the Celtics capturing yet another NBA championship.

But the Alzheimer's changed him. It not only stripped away his mind but his emotional defenses, as well. He now spoke with rapturous delight about the sun whenever it shone. He looked upon a poster of Brazil and his eyes teared up with joy at his memories there. He looked at me with a fondness I never saw in his eyes before.

My father lived with us for six months and now he has gone to spend some time living with my brother in California. And, though the Alzheimer's has robbed him of so much and over the years it will take so much more, it gave my Dad and I chance to do something we had not done since I was eight-years-old when my parents divorced – – to live together. And I think it showed me the true heart of my father, one overflowing with thanksgiving and the joy of life.

You could see it most of all in his favorite song! "Alle Menschen werden Brüder. Ode an die Freude." Beethoven's "Ode to Joy"! He absolutely lit up!

"That's it That's it! The greatest piece of music ever made."

"Pops, what's it mean?"

"All are brothers! All are brothers!" He meant it when he said it. He meant it more than anything.

And, because of Jesus' love that constantly pours forth on every one of us and welcomes us into God's family, it's true. What is God's love like? Indescribable gifts even in the hardest moments of life.

Even in those dark moments, in ways we cannot see or know, God's love is still pouring forth. It is something you have to grasp and believe, because

it does not come by sight but by faith. And now, even more than I ever knew before, that just like at nighttime, that the love of the Son of God is always shining upon us. Amen.