

“ROOTED in Love: Part III”

OT: Genesis 1

NT: Romans 8:28-39

Today we are topping off our sandwich cookie of love. And I do not think there is any better way to top something off than with the ultimate gift of God’s love and what that means for us as God’s children.

(Genesis 1 is God’s creation of the world- “it was good.”) Read Romans 8:28-39

I needed a metaphorical slap in the face this week. I will not go into detail, but this week started out like one of those weeks when emotions are heavy, thoughts are bouncing around like balls in a bingo wheel, and progress seems days away. You ever feel that way? I knew I was off, but I am not even sure I knew just how I felt until Tuesday morning when I heard the song “My Lighthouse” by The Rend Collective play on the radio...

*In my wrestling and in my doubts... In my failures You won't walk out
Your **great love** will lead me through... You are the peace in my troubled sea*

*In the silence, You won't let go... In the questions, Your truth will hold
Your **great love** will lead me through... You are the peace in my troubled sea*

*I won't fear what tomorrow brings... With each morning I'll rise and sing
My **God's love** will lead me through... You are the peace in my troubled sea*

*My lighthouse, my lighthouse... Shining in the darkness. I will follow You
My lighthouse, my lighthouse... I will trust the promise
You will carry me safe to shore*

When I arrived at church, I got out of my car and walked into my office. My computer cycles through a rotation of stock photos and guess what the image was on my screen? A lighthouse. If you are wondering, yes, I considered myself slapped. I did not mind. I needed it. I needed the reminder of where my focus belongs, where my faith belongs, and who my beacon is. I needed the reassurance of a love so great that no doubt or failure or weakness or fear or darkness or anger or hatred could overcome it.

So, thank you, God, for your tough love and slapping me in the face this week. And thank you for the gift of your love to the world. I don’t always stop long enough to acknowledge it directly to you or even myself, so thank you.

You know, I didn't make the connection before this week, but maybe the world needs a love slap. It seems rather simple but isn't love what we need most today in the world. I don't just mean the thought of love or the love I have for sports or my kids telling me silly knock knock jokes. I mean real love. True love. God's love poured out on us and shared through us to everyone we come in contact with. I am talking brotherly and sisterly love with those we know, live with, hang out with, go to church with, work with, play golf and tennis with, sit next to in class, go swimming with, pass in the grocery store, or recognize at a restaurant, **and** I am talking unconditional and steadfast love for those we don't know at all but know God does and God cares about them as much as God cares about us. I am talking about a love that defies logic, is nonjudgmental, unjustifiable, and nondiscriminatory. When I think of love that is what I imagine and strive for. What was it Dionne Warwick sang?

*What the world needs now is love sweet love,
It is the only thing that there is just too little of,
What the world needs now is love sweet love,
No, not just for some but for everyone,*

Lord we don't need another mountain, there are mountains and hillsides, enough to climb... there are oceans and rivers, enough to cross, enough to last till the end of time,

Lord, we don't need another meadow, there are cornfields and wheat fields, enough to grow... there are sunbeams and moonbeams, enough to shine,

*What the world needs now is love sweet love,
It is the only thing that there is just too little of,
What the world needs now is love sweet love,
No, not just for some, but just for everyone...*

Thank you, Dionne Warwick. Brothers and sisters in Christ, and to everyone in the world, what the world needs now more than anything or anyone is the source of love sweet love God. Not just some but everyone. And we don't just need one another to know of God or believe in God, although that is a start. We need each other to truly surrender to God, obey God, depend on God, and recognize the power and presence of God in ourselves and in one another. When we do these things, instead of seeing one another as the world suggests, we will begin seeing one another as God does. We will have God's eyes and ears and heart.

"No one knows the exact age of the human race, but it is surely old enough to know how to love better."

Love is at the very center of all God has created from the beginning. That is right. God's creation is all about love. It was God's love for matter that brought form to the formless. The chaos and darkness were not enough alone, so God gave order and light and purpose to that matter. Why? Not because God was bored and wanted something else to do 😊, but because God cared and because God had a vision.

I believe that from order to light, space to sky, land to sea, day to night, land animals to water animals, to humankind, God's creation is a love story about providing everything necessary for the pinnacle of creation, humanity. God took the time, as only someone who loves does, to get everything in order before putting humanity into action. God paid attention to every detail, including giving *adam*- the groundling- responsibility. God knew humanity wouldn't do well without purpose and God knew creation wouldn't do well without care. God wanted humanity to succeed so that humanity would in return love God back. That's right. I believe God created in love to get love in return. It makes sense doesn't it? You get out what you put in right?

Well, to say the very least, God has held up God's end of the bargain. How has humanity done on their end? How have we done in loving God back?

You and I both know every element of a love story is not perfect. Love requires effort and work. Love requires commitment and sacrifice. From the beginning of creation to today, God's story is one big love story made up of millions of individual love stories. Every birth, your birth and my birth, is the beginning of another love story within God's big love story. God's love is not just poured out at our birth though. God's love continues to be poured into us throughout our lives. This is evident in God's search for us, like a shepherd looking for the lost sheep. With every turn of the head and heart humanity has had away from God, God has committed and sacrificed to reconcile the relationship back to its original state of harmony.

I think this is some of what Paul is writing about to the Romans.

In verse 28 Paul states, "all things work together for good for those who love God." This is great news for those who love God, but it comes with the realization that not all things will be good initially. It simply means that God, through God's love, has the power to make something that is bad or ugly or harmful into good. It means we can go through the beginning of a week like me this week and because of God's love and my love for God, what I was experiencing will be manifested for good. Does that mean I know immediately what "good" will come out of my bad or ugly experience? No. But I can trust that God, out of love, will take care of me and provide for me in abundance.

And at the end of Chapter 8, Paul states that nothing, nothing at all can separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the promise of all promises. Just like verse 28, this passage presupposes that there will be a battle of wills and sides to be chosen. It suggests that there will be many things that will fight for our allegiance and indeed, because of our humanity and nature to sin and turn away from God (see Genesis 2), we will get distracted from God, follow other powers and rulers at some point in life, even at the expense of our created nature to be God's faithful children, and will need the lighthouse to shine and bring us back to shore safely.

With limited reason we might shed a shadow of doubt on the word "nothing." Are you telling me that there is really "nothing" that can keep God's love from me? Yes. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus and the gift of true life given to us through him, nothing is greater than that. Jesus was sent to live, die, and be raised as the definitive remedy in breaking all bonds of oppression for all. That is what Paul is declaring because that is what the nature of God's love is. God's love is unconditional and steadfast and "love is the only service that power can't command or money buy."

In the end, I believe Paul is saying something similar to the dream I shared two weeks ago. The man was all worked up because his time had come to face his judgment for all the things he had done wrong or people he had hurt. But it wasn't judgment God was after. It was celebration for the love the man had shared. It was celebration for the true love in his heart that shined like a beacon on a hilltop. "Love does not keep a ledger of the sins and failures of others." God sent Jesus to free us from any bondage keeping us from being who God created us to be so that we can feel liberated to focus on God's original intent for creation, love.

"Humans are made to run on love, and they do not function well on anything else." We may react strongly and constructively to criticism, command, duty, and emotional tempers, but that doesn't mean we run well on them. "Duty makes us do things well, but love makes us do them beautifully." When we were created, we were created out of love to love. God pours love into us for that love to then pour out of us. If something else mixes with our love diluting it in any way, we will not function as best we can. I cannot help but think of "you are what you eat" or "what goes in must come out." This applies to food, language, teachings, example, habit. We must be selective. We don't put soda in a gas tank and expect the car to run, do we? If it is not supportive of the nature of love, we must be prepared to be sluggish, fearful, anxious, and unsettled.

No matter how heavy life gets, may we all remember that God's love will prevail. No matter how much trash you are carrying, may we all remember that Christ's sacrificial love works to dispose of it. God loves us, and may we all remember that God loves us, not because of who we are, but because of who God is. And because God loves us, we can in return love God and love others with the same love God has shown us.

How? Here are the top five ways you can share God's love in your life today. Counting down from five to one:

5. Believe in you!

Joyce Meyer writes "I think it would absolutely set the church on fire if every Christian would realize they have what it takes to make a difference in the lives of others."

4. Pray for others!

Prayer is our most powerful resource. Be specific. Call someone by name. Ask God to reveal true love them and for them to be open and ready to receive it.

3. Be an inspiration!

Encourage and build up. Don't criticize, complain, or hurt. Say words and take action that build up and don't destroy. Bring joy to comfort.

2. Reach out!

Seek a resolution to a personal conflict. Forgive wholeheartedly. Refrain from holding a grudge and malice, anger and bitterness.

1. Love God!

To love others best, we must love God the most!

There are so many little things we can do within each of these. I am going to post 31 ways children can share God's love shared by a mom of three. As you think of productive ways your children or grandchildren can make a difference in the world today, and fill time outside the screen, I would encourage you to try some of these. One a day. One random act of kindness a day. One act of love for another a day. Love is contagious. Let's see how far being rooted in God's love can go!

Let all God's people say... Amen.