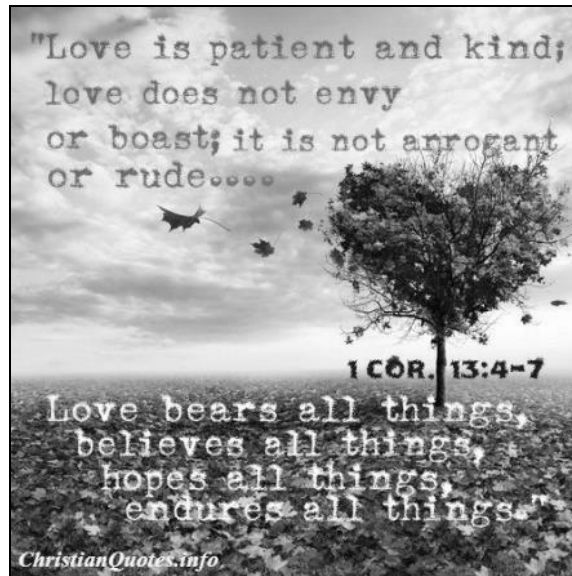


THE SAVING POWER OF LOVE



Scripture:

Psalm 71:1-6

¹In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. ²In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. ³Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

⁴Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel. ⁵For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth. ⁶Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹²For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



THE SAVING POWER OF LOVE

What is love? Isn't that an ancient question? There are so many songs, poems, books, trainings, and other publications written about love. It is what makes the world go round, and last night at the Sacred Space service we ended the evening with the Beatles song: "All Ya Need is Love!"

Chris Rhodes shared a reflection on love, and we discussed the scripture we read today and the four kinds of Love: Eros, Philia, Storge, and Agape. C.S. Lewis wrote a book on *The Four Loves* and we watched a video made from a radio broadcast of C. S. Lewis teaching about love. He said the most spiritual kind of love was philia "friendship love." It is a choice to have friends. We are instinctually driven to procreate and have Eros love. And Storge is the parent/child love. Agape is unconditional love from God.

SMALL THINGS WITH GREAT LOVE

Margot Starbuck also wrote a book on love with a different perspective titled: *Small Things with Great Love: Adventures in Loving your Neighbors*.

Starbuck starts out the book confessing that she always thought of Mother Teresa as a super hero like Jesus. So, she didn't push herself to serve others and love her neighbors in need because she knew she couldn't measure up to the super heroes that devote their lives to helping others. But then she discovered Mother Teresa's quote that said, "You don't have to do great things." It is more than enough to do "small things with great love."

Now Starbuck realized she could no longer ignore Jesus' clear invitation to engage with a world in need. So, she took on the challenge to do small things and found much power in them. She started by learning the first name of her daughter's school bus driver and made a point to thank her by her name daily. Then she met a man

named Hugh who shares his life with the homeless in Raleigh, North Carolina. When he spoke at Margot's church, he challenged them to consider purposely investing in relationships that cross boundaries of shelter, race, religion and income.

One guy in the church decided to take Hugh up on his challenge to show love to those who live on the "margins" of society. Chuck explained to Hugh that his life was very busy, he had a family and he said, "So the one day of the week that I have at home with my family, I don't want to go to the park and meet homeless people."

So, Hugh replied with a question: Do you have an office? Chuck said, "Yes, I do." Hugh asked if there was an office cleaner. He said yes, there was a woman who cleaned three times a week. Hugh asked what her name was, but Chuck didn't know even though she had been the cleaning lady for eight years.

A few weeks later Chuck called Hugh, told him her name was Maria and that he learned she worked two jobs to feed her three kids. That really bothered Chuck. He had never met someone personally who worked two jobs and had latchkey kids at home. He felt uncomfortable about having lived such an insulated life. So, he found a tutor for Maria who would help her with her English.

Over time a receptionist job came open at his company and it paid enough so that Maria could work during the day and be with her kids at night.

JESUS LOVED EVERYBODY

The book also describes how Jesus loved everybody he met but he was especially focused on helping people that we often feel uncomfortable around: the leper, the person with epilepsy, those shunned by society. It is scary to reach out to the stranger, isn't it?

Margot Starbuck says you might think that to live fearlessly, meeting the needs of the poor and homeless takes a lot of courage. But she said it doesn't take courage. What it takes is to be moved by God's love, and God's unshakeable love is a love that is everlasting and contagious.

Margot thinks the small acts of love are powerful enough to bring God's kingdom to

earth. In her book she wrote, “As we extend small acts of self-giving love over the course of our normal day, God’s kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.” Then she goes deeper and talks about the way Jesus role modeled self-giving love for others.

HENRI NOUWEN

She mentions, as an example, Henri Nouwen who took Christ’s teachings on self-giving very seriously. She said that Nouwen heard Jesus speaking to him in the passage about the rich man asking what he needed to do to inherit eternal life and Jesus said to sell everything and follow him. Nouwen took this to mean for him personally to get rid of what made him feel secure and comfortable.

So, in his book, *The Road to Daybreak*, Henri Nouwen says, “When I looked critically at my life, I gave some money, some of my time, some of my energy, but I always worked towards maintaining my own security. Thus, I never really gave God a chance to show me his boundless love for me.” So Nouwen changed his life and moved into a community of people with developmental disabilities.

Nouwen also shared his personal struggle with depression in his book, *The Inner Voice of Love*, which contained writings from his diary that he kept from December 1987 to June 1988, during one of his most serious bouts with clinical depression.

In Henri Nouwen’s books he likes to explore the many aspects of how God’s love and forgiveness is unconditional. He invites the reader to imitate him in his personal return to the spiritual fountain that helped him heal: prayer. He said, “To pray is to listen to the voice of the One who calls us the ‘beloved.’”

Nouwen believes that God’s love saved him from depression and inspired him to get medical help and change his life. God’s love can change yours, too, if you tap into God’s energy of love all around you.

LAUREN DAIGLE

Lauren Daigle is a young example of how trust in God’s love can pull one through hardships. She won the Dove Award for new artist in 2015, and she is nominated for four Grammys this year which will be awarded next week.

One of her newest songs was performed on the finals on last season’s America’s Got Talent and on Good Morning America, too. The song is called: “You Say.” She wrote it when she was feeling overwhelmed and not sure of herself.

At age fifteen, Lauren went through a terrible bout of chronic fatigue as a result of contracting a cytomegalovirus that attacked her immune system resulting in a Lupus like disease. While her immune system was compromised, she also contracted Lyme disease. But during the years when she was forced to be homebound trying to heal from all the illnesses, she began song writing.

Now Lauren is twenty-seven years old, she has won seven Gospel Music of America Dove Awards, two *Billboard* Music Awards, two American Music Awards and has a total of four nominations at the Grammy Awards. And the best part is she feels totally healed and disease free.

In her free time, she goes on mission trips and supports the organization called “Restore Her” that takes in girls who have been sex trafficked and gives them a home with a family and long-term therapy.

I mention all this because her trust in God’s love is what she credits with pulling her through all her sufferings and self-doubt. Here is one of her songs that is nominated for a Grammy next week:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8WK9HmF53w>

"You Say"

I keep fighting voices in my mind
that say I'm not enough
Every single lie that tells me
I will never measure up
Am I more than just the sum of
every high and every low?

Remind me once again just who I am
because I need to know

You say I am loved
when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong
when I think I am weak
And You say I am held
when I am falling short
And when I don't belong,
oh You say I am Yours
And I believe, oh I believe
What You say of me
I believe

The only thing that matters now is everything

You think of me
In You I find my worth, in You
I find my identity, o-oo

You say I am loved
when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong
when I think I am weak
And You say I am held
when I am falling short
And when I don't belong,
oh You say I am Yours
And I believe, oh I believe
What You say of me
Oh, I believe

Taking all I have and now
I'm laying it at Your feet
You have every failure God,
and You'll have every victory, o-oo

You say I am loved
when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong
when I think I am weak
You say I am held
when I am falling short

When I don't belong,
oh You say I am Yours
And I believe, oh I believe
What You say of me
I believe

Oh I believe
Yes I believe
What You say of me
Oh I believe

Benediction:

You all have God's love within you. Tap into that saving power worth more than gold. Share it with others.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen



**The Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**