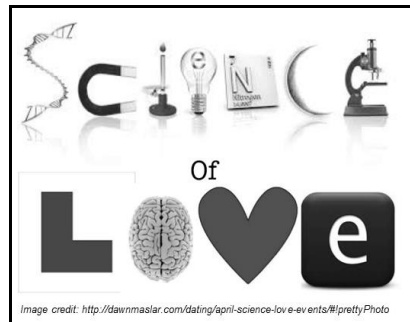


THE SCIENCE OF LOVE



Scripture:

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

¹You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, ²will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”

⁹Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, ¹⁰no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. ¹²On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone. ¹³You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

¹⁴Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. ¹⁵When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them. ¹⁶With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

Luke 4:1-15

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ ¹¹and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

¹²Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

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



All through the season of Lent this sermon series will contain both religious and scientific perspectives on topics reflected upon in the scriptures that apply to our daily lives. I will be

using the lectionary passages and connecting them to our Lenten series topics.

GOD'S LOVE

So since today is Valentine's Day, we will be talking about love and the understanding of love from both a scientific and a biblical viewpoint.

Today's scripture passage does not contain the word love, but it shows us how faith in God sustains us and makes us resilient against temptation. That is what love is. Love sustains us and makes us more resilient. God's love helps us resist temptations and reassures us that God is with us even in our darkest moments.

In this passage, the devil is the embodiment of a destructive force that wants only to see Jesus self-destruct by succumbing to the temptation to demonstrate his powers for selfish reasons. The devil in the passage is the opposite of God. The devil is the power of hate, Our God is the power of love. Love overcomes hate and selfishness. Love provides the way out of a self-destructive path.

OUR SELF-CENTEREDNESS

We all have a devilish self-centered tendency lurking within our brains hoping to tempt us to be powerfully and foolishly selfish, and untrusting of God. But when we focus on doing all we can out of love and faith in God, then the devil has no hold on us.

God is love according to 1st John 4:8. And 1st John 4:19 says, We love because God first loved us.

Jesus was able to overcome the devil's temptations because he was sure of who he was and what his purpose was, to personally demonstrate in the flesh what God's love looks like. He came to show us that God's love is so deep that he would go to the cross and make the ultimate sacrifice for each one of us.

The power of love that surpasses all our human understanding is here now, and at our time of death it is waiting to receive us into the next stage of eternal life. I have seen glimpses of it when I was with people in their time of transition from this life to the next. And I am convinced that it is even deeper and more amazing than we can imagine.

In God's mysterious ways, God heals and provides a path that keeps our connection to God's love despite our wayward mistakes.

MR. ROGERS

Mr. Rogers who was ordained as a Presbyterian minister before he started his TV career said this about love:

"Love isn't a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like struggle. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now."

THREE TRUTHS ABOUT LOVE

Bill Bright, who founded Campus Crusade for Christ, elaborated on this. He said that there are three truths about love that we all should know. Bright says that love is the greatest power ever known.

The #1 truth about love is: God loves you unconditionally.

God loves you in spite of your disobedience, your weakness, your sin and your selfishness. And God loves you enough to provide a way to abundant, eternal life.

The #2 truth about love is: God's love reaches beyond circumstances. The early Christians endured persecution, hardships and unbelievable suffering. Yet Paul wrote to them: "*Who then can ever keep Christ's love from us? When we have trouble or calamity, when we are hunted down or destroyed, is it because He doesn't love us anymore? And if we are hungry, or penniless, or in danger, or threatened with death, has God deserted us? No, for the Scriptures tell us that for his sake we must be ready to face death at every moment of the day – trusting that victory is ours though Christ who loved us more than we can ask for or imagine.*

For I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love."

Bright says, "Such love is beyond our ability to grasp with our minds, but it is not beyond our ability to experience it with our hearts."

The #3 truth about love is: Viewing others as God's creation motivates love.

As a Christian we must Love our neighbors. It is the main commandment Jesus gave us after the commandment to love God with our whole being. We must love our neighbor because they too are creatures of God made in the image of God. God doesn't say love only the neighbor who looks and acts like you. Love your homeless neighbor. Love your foreign neighbor. Love the refugee, the immigrant, the drug addicted, the imprisoned and the mentally ill.

Jesus even took it a step further when he said in Matthew 5:43: *There is a saying, "Love your friends and hate your enemies." But I say: Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you.*"

(That doesn't mean you have to go over to Isis and hug them. But prayer is powerful and may make some sort of difference in their lives.)

Bill Bright encourages all of us to "lose ourselves in loving service to those in need on behalf of Jesus." (Such as supporting the Haiti mission trip)

Bright says, "When Christians deeply commit to act like Christians and love God, their neighbors, and their enemies, we will see in our time, as in the first century, a great transformation in the whole of society."

What a wonderful prophecy!

SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVE ON LOVE

The scientific perspective on love analyzes the evidence and concludes that humans are designed to love. For example, our brains respond to love as if given the most powerful addictive drug ever made.

Three biological chemicals are involved when you are feeling loved and showing love: Oxytocin, Vasopressin and Dopamine.

Oxytocin is a hormone released in both male and female brains when they feel loved. It is also released during childbirth and helps cement the strong bond between Mom and baby.

Vasopressin is another hormone released in the brain during a loving long term relationship. It produces a feeling of contentment and security.

The organic chemical Dopamine is released not only when you interact with your biological child, but adoptive parents also enjoy an increase in the feel-good chemicals oxytocin and dopamine when they're with their adopted children, too. All children with healthy loving attachments to their caregivers feel regular rushes of dopamine when spending time with their parents and loving grandparents as well!

The feelings of wellbeing produced by dopamine are thought to be similar to the effects of opiate drugs. Some would say that the artificial "highs" induced by some drugs mirror those intense feelings that flow between a parent and baby.

Neurologists discovered that romantic love centers in the brain and addiction pathways are the same. So when a love relationship is lost, the love-lorn experiences symptoms of withdrawal. Lack of appetite, trouble sleeping, irritability, depression and poor judgment all can result from lost love.

LENT

Lent is a perfect time to be focused on God who encourages us to love ourselves and our neighbors near and far. I have pledged to put one thing in a bag each of the forty days of Lent so by the end of Lent I will have forty things to give away to Goodwill.

As humans we were naturally created to love. When we fearlessly act out of our natural authentic selves, love flows. As a result we feel better because our brains respond positively to the giving and the loving.

Do yourself and your brain a favor this Lenten season and be loving as Christ showed us how to love. Reflect daily on your relationship with God, the source of all love. Your loving ways will bring out the best in the people around you, and enable them to serve Christ and love others in a more fruitful way, too. Amen

Benediction:

The kind of love God gives us is supernatural. And yet we get glimpses of it when we are interacting with our loved ones.

I thought our Boy Scouts would like this video because it is filmed during a hike in a forest around a lake in the rain.

Rob Bell, the father, is carrying his very young son in a pack on his back as he walks. He says,

"Do you ever have one of those moments ... like ... if you could just freeze it? It's so beautiful."

If you could freeze a moment from your life, what moment would that be?

"I look up and I notice clouds. And then it starts to rain. It always rains, doesn't it?" "When the rains come. It's not like they might. They do. It rains in our lives ... a lot."

What are some of the storms in your life? Is it raining now? Do you think God intentionally puts us through trials?

Isn't there an easier way for us to learn?

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine

and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

Matthew 7:24-27 (NIV)

"God says these amazing things like, 'When you cry out to me, I listen.' He even says, 'I cannot ignore the cries of someone who is afflicted.'"

Have you ever felt like God failed to come through for you? Looking back, do you still feel the same?

"The Psalms speak over and over again about crying. About crying out to God."

Is anyone crying for help? God is listening, ready to rescue you.

Psalm 34:17 (MSG)

Evening, morning, and noon, I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.

Psalm 55:17 (NIV)

For he will rescue the poor who cry out and the afflicted who have no helper.

Psalm 72:12 (HCSB)

I long and yearn for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh cry out for the living God.

Psalm 84:2 (HCSB)

O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you.

Psalm 88:1 (NIV)

"There's this false, twisted idea out there among religious people that somehow you've got to have it all together to have a relationship with God."

Do you ever act like everything is okay even when it isn't? Why do we do this?

"God says to us, 'When you come to me, come to me with all your junk, with all your problems, come to me all screwed up, all messed up. Let me take care of it.'"

What does your junk look like? Is it stopping you from crying out to God?

I am caught in a maze and I cannot find my way out, blinded by tears of pain and frustration.

King David in Psalm 88:8 (MSG)

(Speaking about his baby who is getting very wet and is crying, he says...)

"It's all he knows. He sees no reality beyond the storm.

What he doesn't realize is that, as his dad, I would do anything to get him home."

Do you have anyone in your life who you would do anything for? Do you think that's how God feels about you?

"Rain come down, come and heal these sores, wash them clean, come and heal my soul."

"I stop. I kneel down, and take him out of the pack. I pull him close to my chest, and I wrap my arms around him. I hold him so tightly up against my heart. And for the last mile of our walk, the entire time, I bend over and whisper into his ear, over and over again, 'I love you, buddy. We're gonna make it. Dad knows the way.'"

When you're going through really hard times and everything seems hopeless, do you still trust that God knows the way and that you're going to make it?

There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place.

Deuteronomy 1:31 (NIV)

"May you, when you're soaking wet, lost, hurting, and confused, may you cry out and may the creator of the universe take you out of your pack, may he hold you tight up against his chest, may he wrap his eternal loving arms around you, and may you hear him whisper ... I love you buddy. We're going to make it. Dad knows the way home. We're gonna make it. I love you."

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 forever more. Amen



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
February 14, 2016**