

THE LOVE OF GOD

*Rev Jim Allan
Camrose United Church
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Romans 8:28-39 - All things work together for good

“All things work together for good” and “nothing can separate us from the Love of God...” These statements affirm both the Love of God and the unity of all creation. So today, I want to talk about the Love of God, and in particular, how the unity of all creation is rooted in this universal Love.

Our United Church Creed begins by affirming that “we are not alone, we live in God’s world.” That’s an idea, a truth, at the heart of life that we need to hang on to. We don’t always do that; we lose touch with that truth, and then we can reconnect with it. And that’s some of the dynamic of our spiritual life, why we are here. What I try to do as a spiritual leader is to help people reconnect with those central truths about life; and this is one of them, the sense of the love of God in which everything comes together in a unity to which we all belong. We experience being out of touch with the unity that is rooted in the Love of God in many different ways, different at different stages of life and for different kinds of people.

As I was thinking about that I considered a few examples of what it means to feel disconnected from the world around us. People in old age sometimes begin to feel alienated from the world just because things are changing so fast. There’s a sense of not really understanding what is going on around us any more--and that’s all the way from international politics to trying to figure out how to work a telephone. People in mid-life experience the pain, the brutality, the cruelty of life that at times leaves them feeling rejected and left out. Whether it’s from loss, from unemployment, or from some kind of a sense of failure in life, most of us at some time touch a point like that which leaves us feeling disconnected and not belonging. Or in youth, people can come into life with idealism and then come face to face with the corruption of this world and feel utterly betrayed. Or young people can feel overwhelmed by the very complexity and hazards of life. In many different ways we can feel disconnected, feel that we are left out, that we’re not a part of what we see around us in this world; and we look to our faith to find a way to recover that sense of belonging and wholeness and oneness.

Paul says all things work together for good. That’s a hard statement to hear and understand and accept. “All things work together for good.” Well, I don’t know about you but in the back of my mind I’ve got a little chattery voice that goes “uh-uh, I saw something that wasn’t working together for good yesterday; I saw something on the news; I met somebody who was not working together for good, at least not with me.” It’s really easy to look at life and see a whole lot that is just not working together, and it certainly doesn’t look like it’s working for good. Paul is touching into a deeper truth

here. We need to look at life in a way that is different from the way we look, as some people described it, from our ego which judges everything--this is good, this is bad--as if we know what is good or bad. There's pain and joy, there's corruption and there's purity, there are all the different opposites in life that seem blended together and part of the wholeness of life.

Jesus says the wheat and the weeds grow together all the way through life, and don't become separated until far down at the end. So we need to live our lives with this mix. The writer in Proverbs says the rain falls on the wicked and the good, the just and the unjust. This touches the paradoxical nature of life. All that seems to be right and wrong, good and bad, blends into a wholeness or a unity that comes from some place beyond which we must really struggle to see.

I want to read a brief quotation from *The Wisdom of the Enneagram: The Complete Guide to Psychological and Spiritual Growth for the Nine Personality Types*, by Riso and Hudson. They say real love is frightening. "It entails the dissolution of boundaries and the death of the ego. Yet as we learn to surrender to the action of Holy Love, we reconnect with the ocean of Being and realize that at our core, we are this Love." This is holy love, divine love, the love of God. It is something that is not an individual thing based on our judgement or even on our own experience. It's something far beyond all the ups and downs, ins and outs, goods and bads, and turns of life. It is something beyond all that, this love of God that draws all of reality into a unity, and it's the unity that is the power of God's love. It's a unity of everything to which each one of us belongs and from which each one of us is never left out. And it's remembering the truth that gives us that sense, that recovers for us that sense, of belonging in the universe. That means belonging not just in a neutral, objective sort of way, but in a way that's drawn in and held together and bound by this passionate love of God that is expressed in and through everything--nature, universe, human beings, all forms of life. And when we remember that oneness, that unity, our lives and our hearts are transformed.

That's what Jesus was trying to tell us, trying to live, trying to show people, trying to give people a way that we might catch that vision. And that's hard for us. Even when we do catch it and have moments of feeling an "okness"--I'm okay, I'm part of the universe, I'm here, I'm loved, I'm well, I'm safe--we still lose it. The next day something happens and we get lost in our ego and our judgements and our fears, and we lose touch with that vision. Maybe it's because we have different ways of understanding love. They're not wrong ways; they're just different ways because love is so diverse. When we love romantically and marry we fall in love and have that one special person. And that's a marvellous part of life. But what really gives it its power is the sense that someone loves us in that special way more than anyone else.

But that's not the way God loves us. We have a habit of turning God's love into that, as if God's love is a sort of favouritism--more for one person than for another--as if God loves this kind of people better than that kind, or as if God has favourites or special people. We see the difficulties of other people and think God has forgotten to love them. Or we think that God loves us more when we act in a particular way, and less when we don't act in that way. That's all an ego-bound way of loving which is very much a part of our lives. It's like sibling rivalry--"Mom loved you better than me"--all of that which is very deeply engrained in the human psyche. But the truth about God's love takes us

beyond all of that. It has no partiality, it has no conditions; it's universal and it's constant. And when we can remember past all that partiality of love, and remind ourselves again of that ocean of God's love that draws all reality into a oneness and a unity, then we can feel our own sense of belonging.

The well-known preacher William Sloan Coffin said "We are not called to create unity; we are called to recognize unity." So it's about perception. It's not something to do; it's not something to create or build or earn. Jesus' message of grace and forgiveness is that we must cut through all of the "am I good enough, am I better than, am I . . .?" We need to get past all of that and to a place where the love of God is simply the universal constant. It's just a matter of seeing it--not making it or earning it, but rather just seeing it and reminding ourselves of it. And it makes a difference.

In my own life experience, when I really get out of touch with the love of God I feel alone, I feel isolated, I feel afraid, I feel angry about other people and other things that are going on, and I want just to walk away and hide or run away and hide. I lose my motivation and energy. I feel like "what does it matter to do anything." But when I reconnect with that sense of belonging and being embraced and welcomed and included in all of reality, I get back my energy and my motivation. Things that I do in my life all matter again. That's how it transforms my own experience. And each of you needs to look to see what difference the love of God makes in your experience. It's not something to do; it's just a matter of prayer and hearing and perception, and telling yourself "I'm loved as a part of this whole of creation, not for any reason, but just because I belong and God's love fills the universe." And then we can let go of those judgements that separate everything out, and those preconceived notions about what we are seeing and what something is. We can then see life, we can then see one another, with a kind of freshness of view, with what we call wonder, true wonder. Then our lives are transformed and we are able to look at a flower or a person, or experience some feeling or thought, with a pure sense of wonder that comes from the recognition that everything we see and everything we experience is embraced by that universal ocean of God's love.

Transcribed by Sue and By Reesor