

“Nurturing Love”

John 17:20-26 & Psalm 8

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The 4WD, large tire, huge engine, modified mini tour bus roared as it bounced up the steep road. The passengers were adding layers of clothes as they traveled from 80 to 30 degrees. In just a few hours we went from sea level to 13,796 feet. We went from the light of being under partly cloudy skies, to the dim, dense fog of being in a cloud, to the intense light of being above the clouds. From the sea floor base to its peak, Hawaii’s Maunakea is the tallest mountain on earth. At the summit, the wind pushed us around wildly flapping anything that was loose. The air smelled fresh and pure. We breathed deeply, struggling to get enough oxygen from air that had 40% less oxygen. The horizon was rolling, fluffy clouds that were constantly changing colors as the sunset. Peering at the distance you could see the curvature of the earth. The sun was huge, intensely radiant. Even with sunglasses and shielding my eyes, I could only look at the sun for few seconds. Standing still I felt like I was flying. Leslie’s hug gave me the warm sensation of love and kept me shielded from the frigid wind chill. The sunset filled the sky with dazzling, luminous, radiant colors before the sun said goodnight waving a sliver of light. We got back on the bus and drove down the mountain to a wind shielded, warmer spot to view the stars. I was concerned because we were back in a cloud. Our guide reassured us that it would soon be clear; because after sunsets, the temperature drops causing the clouds to descend down the mountain a few thousand feet per hour. A clear sky emerged with twinkling stars. Our guide focused the large telescope on a variety of stars, planets, and galaxies explaining that some of them were thousands of light years away. Some stars no longer exist, yet the light is still making its way to earth.

I was overwhelmed with a sense that I am really, really, incredibly minuscule, so small. I felt the wonder of freedom and love in that moment. I am so small, making what I worry and fret about even smaller. The stuff I have, the things I do are so tiny. My life on earth, in terms of light years, is a mere instant. My body what is seen and can be touched is mainly water and a few deteriorating cells. Compared to the enormity of the universe I am small. In time my earthly life is fleeting. Yet I, and you, have infinite value because we are loved by God. Our mistakes and worries are tiny. Joy and love is abundant. Our souls live forever. Love we receive or share endures forever. I cannot find words that can explain what happened. Every day I am discovering new insights of that moment. I woke up. Laid down my burdens. Scales fell from my eyes. I sensed new dimensions. Realizing how small I was revealed the enormity of God’s grace. All my faults, mistakes, worries, and burdens were swallowed up by a black hole freeing me to soar in God’s love, in Leslie’s love. All my senses were flooded with instances of joy, laughter, and playfulness from throughout my life.

The psalmist sings, **Psalm 8 “O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens. You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you. When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents. O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!”**

Two weeks later I was in Niger, Africa. Most of the people I met had a lot less stuff, yet they were grateful, joyful, and loving. They didn’t seem anxious, burdened, or worried. Those with nice

houses and fine clothes ate, listened, laughed, and celebrated with those in tattered clothes, who had no house only a mat. Sharing love and joy filled them with abundant life. Materially they were poor. In living life, they were rich.

One week later I hiked to inspiration point in Yosemite National Park. I noticed a piece of asphalt, then notice that once there was a parking lot where I was standing. Upon careful examination, I found smaller trees and brush revealing where a road once came up the mountain. Someone spent I good part of their life working to build that road, so people could drive up with ease to enjoy the view. Someone else spent a good part of their life working to remove that road, so people could enjoy the hike and the view from a pristine spot. Both loved inspiration point. Both were filled with joy at inspiration point. Their worries and work over a road verses a trail occupied a lot of their life, perhaps causing sleepless nights, grueling work, and heated debates; yet, all of that is fleeting, gone. Their love for inspiration point has drawn a multitude to experience the beauty. I shared their love and joy in that place as will others for eternity.

Today we celebrate God's nurturing love that we often experience through mothers. What do you think of this statement? "What you do is not nearly as important as how you do it. What is more important a clean house established by fussing and yelling or a dirty house overflowing with love; a luxurious house with strife or a hut full of joy?"

John 17:20-26 Jesus said, "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began! "O righteous Father, the world doesn't know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them."

Barbara Berry-Bailey said, "According to Jesus, the prime directive for us as people of God is simply this: to love one another—to love one another as Jesus loved us ... to go deep within ourselves to hear the still, small voice; to go deep within ourselves to feel the strength of those everlasting arms; to go deep within ourselves to rise to meet the challenge to love when everything else in our society tells us to strike out in fear, when everything else in our society tells us to lash out in hatred or to release anger in a violent manner."

God is constantly permeating the entire cosmos with "love you notes" to each of us and with joy for us to discover and savor. To become one with God and each other we need to receive God's love and share love.

When I opened all my sense to receive God's love, suddenly I saw an entire new dimension of joyful love. I woke up, my window changed. In my travels, I experienced beauty beyond my wildest imagination. The love of Leslie, Spencer, and Abigail became increasingly wondrous. All of this love and joy was there before, I was just missing most of it. I am sure that there is still much more love and joy for me to discover.

Over my life, I have strived to receive and share love by goals, spiritual practices, balance, and rhythm. I felt joyful love was something I had to create, somehow muster up, that I had to balance out the dark moments with light, that I had to get to some place, establish some state of mind, produce some feeling, practice some type of soul care to be joyful and loving. I saw that there is joy and love in every instant, in every happening, even in the dark chaos of life. It may be the middle of the night where I am

at, yet every second the sun is rising someplace. Land is being taken by the ocean, yet somewhere lava is flowing creating new land. In arguments is engagement by both sides, a passion to journey to a better way of being. In loss is a celebration of all you got to experience. In death is life. In fear is an opportunity to discover a new joyful experience. In struggle is growth. Love and joy is all around me and in me I just miss most of it.

Anthony de Mello explains that most people are asleep. Our routines, our familiar paths, our expectations of ourselves, what we think others expect of us, keep us going through a constant array of motions and tasks, keeping us asleep. Our attitude keeps us asleep.

Anthony said, "Imagine that you are unwell and in a foul mood, and they are taking you through some lovely countryside. The landscape is beautiful but you are not in the mood to see anything. A few days later you pass the same place and you say, "Good heavens, where was I that I didn't notice all of this?" Everything becomes beautiful when you change. Or you look at the trees and the mountains through windows that are wet with rain from a storm, and everything looks blurred and shapeless. You want to go right out there and change those trees, change those mountains. Wait a minute, let's examine your window. When the storm ceases and the rain stops, and you look out the window, you say, "Well, how different everything looks." We see people and things not as they are, but as we are." That is why when two people look at something or someone, you get two different reactions. We see things and people not as they are, but as we are.

In seeing how very small I am I sensed how much I am loved. I saw how a litany of my flaws has kept me from seeing joy and love. In realizing how messed up I am as a husband, I received an entire new depth of love from Leslie inspiring me to love her deeper than I once perceived possible. I changed my window. I woke up.

Dag Hammarskjöld said, "God does not die on the day we cease to believe in a personal deity. But we die on the day when our lives cease to be illumined by the steady radiance of wonder renewed daily, the source of which is beyond all reason."

I am joyful when I am aware of a mere snippet of the constant radiance of wonder, blessings, beauty and love God shines on the entire cosmos and me every instant. My life may be in chaos, yet there is beauty everywhere. At the same instant I am head down, buried in dreary feelings, crushing thoughts, and brutal circumstance, God is expressing joyful love through the beauty of every person, Sequoia trees, green sea turtles, thundering waves, majestic mountains. Every instant God is expressing joyful love through wonders around the earth that I have never even seen. Just because I am unable to see them does not diminish their existence. And that is just on earth. There is a cosmos full of planets, full of wonders. Every instant God showers us with an enormous orchestra of joyful love hoping we will wake up. Every instant God is permeating even the messy, painful, sinful, disasters of life with a dimension of joyful love hoping we will wake up. Every instant God is revealing joy, love, and beauty through each person hoping we will wake up.

Today we celebrate God's nurturing love and mothers who often wake us up. Jesus prayed for us to be one with God and each other, to see glory, receive and share glory, together as one. God is calling to us to wake up, to receive joyful love and to share joyful love bringing us together in perfect unity.

Next Sunday I will share another facet of this insight, some ways I have changed, and hopes I have for our future together. The retreat will start by us listening to each other and end by us formulating new ministries. The agenda and talking points are on table in the Narthex/Gathering Space. Please come prepared to share. I am excited for your insights we reveal even more joy and love to me. Amen