

# “Loving Heaven to Earth”

Psalm 148 Revelation 21 1-6 John 13 31-32 & 34-35

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Your purpose in life is to receive and share love. In Psalm 148 the psalmist sings that all of creation praises the Lord. Each member of creation praises God by fulfilling its purpose. Snow praises God by snowing. Stars praise God by twinkling. Small scurrying animals praise God by being small scurrying animals. **Psalm 148 NLT “Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise God from the skies! Praise God, all angels! Praise God, all host! Praise God, sun and moon! Praise God, all you twinkling stars! Praise God, skies above! Praise God, vapors high above the clouds! Let every created thing give praise to the Lord, for God issued God’s command, and they came into being. God set them in place forever and ever. God’s decree will never be revoked. Praise the Lord from the earth, you creatures of the ocean depths, fire and hail, snow and clouds, wind and weather that obey God, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all livestock, small scurrying animals and birds, kings of the earth and all people, rulers and judges of the earth, men and women, seniors and children. Let them all praise the name of the Lord. For God’s name is very great; God’s glory towers over the earth and heaven! God has made people strong, honoring faithful ones—the people of Israel who are close to God. Praise the Lord!”**

We praise God by loving. Jesus said, **John 13:34-35 NRSV “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

The commandment to love one another, to love all people, to love God, to love all of creation, began the moment God created people. Our purpose is to love. We become fully alive when we love. We praise God when we love. Jesus’ resurrection proclaims that all will be resurrected. All of creation will realize its purpose to praise God. People will have their ability to love completely and perfectly resurrected. Each person will be able to love and be loved.

So, what is new about this commandment to love? It is the type of love, grace, supreme sacrificial love, serving love, glorify love, unity love. Jesus commanded the disciples to love after he knelt and washed their feet. We are to love by serving others, even serving those who betray us. Jesus commanded them to love after he told them about his passion, how he would overcome all the sins of the world, every darkness, brokenness, imperfection, and incompleteness by sacrificing on the cross and resurrection glory. We are to follow Jesus’ example of love.

Right before Jesus commanded us to love. **John 13:31-32 NRSV “Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in Jesus. If God has been glorified in Jesus, God will also glorify Jesus in Godself and will glorify God at once.** God’s love produces glory. Each member of the Trinity loves each other perfectly making the three one. Each member glorifies the other who glorifies them. We are to love with glorifying love that unites.

I am filled with wonder and awe as I ponder how you, I, and all people, are created with the capacity to love as God loves. Our purpose is to accept love, nurture love, and grow in love. Our love will grow for eternity.

Our loving brings heaven to earth. **Revelation 21:1-6 NLT “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among people! God will live with them, and they will be God’s people. God will be with them. God will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” And then God said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.” And Jesus also said, “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life.”**

Emmanuel God is with us in Jesus and through the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are a temple for the Holy Spirit. God fills us with love, so we can share love. God blesses us, so we can bless all people. Yet, God is not fully a home with us, because God is perfection, shalom, pure glory. In God, there is no darkness at all. In God, there is no indifference, fear, hate, or brokenness. God will be at home with us when we all love ourselves, each other, and God perfectly. God will be at home with us when we can join God in graciously wiping away every tear. We are commanded to love heaven to earth.

The opposite of love is indifference, which can lead to fear, which can lead to hate. We grow in love as we grow in compassion for all people. We grow in love as we discover how to forgive everyone of everything. We grow in love when we celebrate diversity, instead of trying to change others to be like ourselves. One day we will love each person, and their distinct uniqueness perfectly, making everyone one with God then God will be at home with us. Imagine our future where every person loves everyone as much as God loves us and all of creation fulfills its purpose in praising God.

Saint Augustine said, "It is by running along the road of true love that we can reach our heavenly homeland." Our homeland, the holy city, new Jerusalem, is coming, a time where all and everyone loves perfectly. Our homeland is not otherworldly, it is not far off, no one is excluded. Jesus brought our homeland to earth and commands us to partner with God in loving our homeland into being. We are encouraged to compassionately look at the brokenness, pain, violence, and sin and love to transform all. Jesus took on human flesh to love us to glorious perfection. God is with us to help us love as God loves, to help us be gracious to everyone, and to serve everyone. This type of love is far beyond our understanding, beyond our ability to explain, yet love embraces us enabling us to embrace all of creation. For most, it takes years and years of loving, growing in love to even get close to God's love. Everyday we should strive to love more. If you have tried and tried to love someone but failed, then expand your love in other ways, keep making forward progress for God will enable you to love everyone completely. St Francis said, "You begin by loving and you go on loving and loving teaches you how to love. And the more you love, the more you are able to love."

Today, we meet to ponder God's invitation to love more. Through the Annual Report and our conversations about our ministers, how is God inviting you to expand your love? How is God inviting you outside of your comfort zone to serve in a new way, to give more generously, to be more complete, to be more welcoming, accepting, and gracious? Joy is found in responding to God's invitation to follow in the way of self-giving love. Loving one another as God loves us is only possible by the grace of God transforming us.

Henri Nouwen writes, "As fearful people we are inclined to develop a mindset that makes us say: 'There's not enough food for everyone, so I better be sure I save enough for myself in case of emergency,' or 'There's not enough knowledge for everyone to enjoy; so I'd better keep my knowledge to myself, so no one else will use it' or 'There's not enough love to give to everybody, so I'd better keep my friends for myself to prevent others from taking them away from me.' This is a scarcity mentality. It involves hoarding whatever we have, fearful that we won't have enough to survive. The tragedy, however, is that what you cling to ends up rotting in your hands. "The opposite of a scarcity mentality is an abundance mentality. With an abundance mentality we say: 'There is enough for everyone, more than enough: food, knowledge, love ... everything.' With this mind-set we give away whatever we have, to whomever we meet. When we see hungry people, we give them food. When we meet unaware people, we share our knowledge;". As we grow in love, we discover we have always more love to share and our joy becomes more complete. Michael Leunig said, "Love one another and you will be happy. It's as simple and difficult as that."

Knowing we are commanded to love our enemies and those who hurt us is simple. It takes God's grace permeating our being to repeatedly, consistently, make the choice to forgive and love. It takes another monumental amount of growth to serve those who hurt us. It takes mammoth growth to be able to sacrifice for those who hurt us. God loves us immensely more than this, and that is the way we are to love each person.

The church's primary identifying characteristic is our love for each other, expressing love in serving one another, expressing love in sacrificing for one another, expressing love that brings every person into one world-wide community. The church is to be widely diverse in ethnicity, gender, language, nationality, age, political persuasion and all the other things that we use to label or identify people today. We are to love in a way that each person remains unique and all are united. Love for one another is our essential identifying mark. One cannot fully love God without loving all people.

Today we celebrate the love we have shared over the past year. We have been able to express a wide range of ways we want to worship and love each other. We have been able to advocate for different educational experiences, fellowship, mission, lighting, landscaping, roofing, games, types of food, and love each other. We have been able to vote on opposite sides of issues, support different causes, have different dreams for our families and country, and love each other. We have been able to live in different housing, in different neighbors, take different transportation, and love each other.

Our love for each other is doing amazing things. Our children are discovering how to love and their unique talents in Sunday School. Our youth are learning how to put their love into transformational action through workcamp. Our adults are being accepted, encouraged, and inspired through worship and fellowship to navigate another week. Our seniors are being compassionately cared for by our deacons.

Our love for each other comforts those who hurt, embraces those who struggle and heals all of us, for each of us is broken. Our love for each other celebrates our goodness, propels our creativity, puts extra bounce in our step, harmony in our heart and clarity in our thoughts. Our love for each other helps us know Christ and show Christ.

Our love for each other is heard through the Sanctuary Choir, Northern Bells, Praise Band, organ, piano, African Singers Special Music, and Choral Bells. Our love for each other opens this building up to a variety of groups, organizations, clubs, and people. Our love for each other is transforming the world through mission giving, mission advocacy, and Hands-On Mission. Our love for each other fosters conversations, sharing of God sightings, and professions of faith that help each of us take another step on our journey. Our love for each other propels our dynamic worship.

Our love for each other does so much more. The Annual Report captures a few of the ways we love. Many more ways of love have happened through your care, support, giving, serving, and sacrifice.

Our love for each other has created this place of refuge, this Presbyterian family, where souls are being restored and joy is expanded. Our love for each other enables us to fulfill our purpose, which is love. Today we celebrate love. Amen