

Palisades Presbyterian Church
Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 14, 2006

Reflection: Kindness in words creates confidence; kindness in thinking creates profoundness; kindness in feeling creates love. – Lao Tzu

Readings: Acts 8: 26 - 40
1 John 4: 7 - 21

Hymns: Hymn # 207 How Lovely, Lord
Anthem Love the Lord (Michael Shapiro)
Hymn # 256 Let the Whole Creation Cry
Hymn # 294 Wherever I May Wonder

It Really Does Make the World Go 'Round
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In 1994, Mike Ewell directed a British movie starring Hugh Grant called *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. I vaguely remember the movie, although I do remember that it was enjoyable. I also remember a W. H. Auden poem that was used in the movie – it struck me then, as it does now by its sheer power to reflect the deafening quiet of losses in our life..

Funeral Blues by W. H. Auden

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last for ever; I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood,

For nothing now can ever come to any good.

I know this feeling and I know I am not alone. It is a feeling that paralyzes and causes a temporary vacuum that can take one's inner heart away. It is real, human, and jarring.

In my own experience, I am always amazed at how we find a way or ways carry on after being devastated. Losses are life-changing, but we manage to learn to live with our new situations. Slowly, unwanted stars become pinpoints of hope, again, even beauty.

These are timeless aspects and mysteries of the spirit infused and human condition we share. It is true now, as it was in Jesus' time. It's just five weeks ago in our lectionary that the disciples were scattered, disoriented, frightened, and lost. Death as they knew it had triumphed; and the reign of Jesus ended, brutally on a hill outside of Jerusalem. Yet, slowly the power of his life, the memory and sense, even the apparitions of his spirit permeated the limits of death, refusing to acknowledge its authority or power, and Jesus, resurrected in this way, lived and lives on today.

Acts of the Apostle, written by the same author of Luke, documents these transitions from the fear, loss, and despair to the slow, unstoppable rush or wind of the Spirit. Moved by this sacred wind, Luke was distracted from God on his path and sent another way, encountering the Ethiopian: explaining the words of Scripture to him, baptizing him, and then *whoosh* off again, sounding almost transported as "Beam me up, Scotty!"

The Good News was spreading and with it –new life in the form of a rebirth of love that was always there.

Not everyone gets it. We, gathered here, are among those whose actions and presence say that we know this Spirit and Love and that we want to know more, to build upon it in some way, to have it help make sense of this fractured world.

Yet, making sense of this world – well, I think it's over-rated. To set up our human time as successful or not based on whether or not we understand all the pain and the joy – seems like the wrong measure. Even Jesus on the cross called out in a way that made it clear it was beyond him: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani!" Yet, that human response had no power over his Spirit that brings us here today. His words did not change the truth, just pointed to his humanity.

So what is it? What is it that somehow transcends and surmounts the human condition and elevates us to a place where, even in times of trial, we come back here and we keep going, we keep going...

God, I think. However you know God. I am always aware that we are a gathering of many traditions and that while I use the language of Christianity and all its richness, I am that at best such language is only a pointer to God. So, if you are here today or any day and you find your path a bit differently, know that you are welcome and point with us in your own way, whatever that is.

The God I am referring to is the one in this morning's second reading. Not just the God of Love, but the "God is Love" and "Love is God" deity.

In a passage from one of the resources I use, the author states: "When one confesses that God is love, one is subscribing to nothing less than the Christian view of the universe and the meaning and destiny of human life."

When I came across this, it arrested me on the spot. When "we" confess, share from our deepest sense of self and being, that "God is love" we are stating how we see the universe, life's meaning, and our ultimate destiny.

This is the power we share and it is love. By now, I hope something is starting to stir in you. That maybe in the minutes we have together to think about God as love, to say it aloud, that in that place we are touched with its assurance in many ways.

One way in which I am most moved in seeing love as our destiny – believing in the love of Jesus, the love that Jesus believed in – that so doing brings us and him and all those who have believed before us and will follow – together now in this place. The powers and principalities have no power against the Love of God. We have all been freed and unified in that Love. God is. We are. All is of love. Nothing, no one is ever lost.

Secondly, I cannot think about these things without turning "Kochian" and wonder "How am I doing?" These reflections invite me to examine myself, seeking to align my heart, head, and actions in ways that grow in love. This is not a faint-hearted sort of thing. This is a state of being of demands its essence of love to be directed expressly toward those unlovable, unlovely, and even the hostile. Mat 5: 44-48 says it this way:

On receiving love: "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be children of your Creator who is in heaven; for God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matthew 5:44-45).

On giving love: "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? "And if you greet your sisters and brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:46-48).

The narratives in Acts and the verses from I John that we read today are about this essence of God - the Mother the Father present in all of creation, the ontological nature of the universe and more – it is the Shekinah – the inherently glittering God atoms, existing in all that is and will ever be... here, today, for us to say Yes! to and to go on loving in ways that tell the Good News. That's who we are of, who we are, and what we do.

Let me close with another of Auden's poems:

O Tell Me The Truth About Love
W.H. Auden (1907-1973)

Some say love's a little boy,
And some say it's a bird,
Some say it makes the world go around,
Some say that's absurd,
And when I asked the man next-door,
Who looked as if he knew,
His wife got very cross indeed,
And said it wouldn't do.

Does it look like a pair of pyjamas,
Or the ham in a temperance hotel?
Does its odour remind one of llamas,
Or has it a comforting smell?
Is it prickly to touch as a hedge is,
Or soft as eiderdown fluff?
Is it sharp or quite smooth at the edges?
O tell me the truth about love.

Our history books refer to it
In cryptic little notes,
It's quite a common topic on
The Transatlantic boats;
I've found the subject mentioned in
Accounts of suicides,
And even seen it scribbled on
The backs of railway guides.

Does it howl like a hungry Alsatian,
Or boom like a military band?
Could one give a first-rate imitation
On a saw or a Steinway Grand?
Is its singing at parties a riot?
Does it only like Classical stuff?
Will it stop when one wants to be quiet?

O tell me the truth about love.

I looked inside the summer-house;
It wasn't over there;
I tried the Thames at Maidenhead,
And Brighton's bracing air.
I don't know what the blackbird sang,
Or what the tulip said;
But it wasn't in the chicken-run,
Or underneath the bed.

Can it pull extraordinary faces?
Is it usually sick on a swing?
Does it spend all its time at the races,
or fiddling with pieces of string?
Has it views of its own about money?
Does it think Patriotism enough?
Are its stories vulgar but funny?
O tell me the truth about love.

When it comes, will it come without warning
Just as I'm picking my nose?
Will it knock on my door in the morning,
Or tread in the bus on my toes?
Will it come like a change in the weather?
Will its greeting be courteous or rough?
Will it alter my life altogether?
O tell me the truth about love.

The truth about Love – Yes... all these things – and all there is,

Amen.