

Jesus - God's Gift of Love - Changes Everything

Jesus, name above all names... Emmanuel, God is with us, Blessed redeemer, Living Word
O for a thousand tongues to sing my dear Redeemer's praise, the glories of my God and
King, the triumphs of God's grace.

Christ is Alive, Let Christians sing, The cross stands empty to the sky, love drowned in
death, shall never die

There is a wideness in God's Mercy, like the wideness of the sea, For the love of God is
broader than the measures of the mind If our love were but more faithful, we would
gladly trust God's word, and our lives reflect thanksgiving for the goodness of our Lord.

We are not alone

Lift High the Cross...the Love of Christ proclaim, Til all the world adore his
sacred name.

Songs for this Sunday morning. And - in a sense, this morning, what I want to say to you, to
share with you, is a message, that by the time our worship is over, we will have sung together.

God's love for the world, made known so clearly in the life, teaching, suffering, death and
resurrection of Jesus Christ - changes everything. God's love in Jesus Christ changes
everything we will let God's love touch, everything we will help God's love touch.

The songs, the scriptures, this sermon - are all about that famous verse - as is really the Bible's
story - John 3:16 - Our children know it by heart - don't you? Say it with me - God so
loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him should not
perish but have eternal life.

God's love changes everything. And as we face life everyday in all its possibilities and
challenges - haven't we, haven't you, found this to be true - that God's love has changed you?

Please pray with me.

Lord, may the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your loving and faithful people, be
acceptable to you, and your good word to us this day in Christ. Amen.

Love, God's love for the world, made known in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,
changed and changes everything - it changes how we live and how we die. And how we look
at how we live and how we die.

It is one of those internet stories that pass quickly around. It may have crossed your computer
screen, as it did mine. Which in this case could be a good thing. It's a story about a man, his
heart bearing much grief, burdened with sudden sad turns in his life. A job he thought secure,
gone. And investments ruined by crooked executives who made their bundle. He beloved
taken too soon in a tragic accident.

His soul seeped in anger and resentment and despair - with no where else to turn, he prayed. Lord - so much of what you've asked of me I've tried to do. To give of what you've given me, to aid, to comfort, to be fair. But it's not fair and I cannot live up to your command. I cannot forgive what others have done to me. How can I?

And in his mind's eye he saw a rude crude cross like tree. Blood stained. And then a form, a shape. And he heard Jesus speak. Have you ever lied? Yes he said. Or borrowed something from your work - for good. Or used my name in vain? Or shaded truth for your own gain? Yes, Lord, yes, the man's answers came.

And in his mind he heard the words come down, like drops of blood. I forgive you. Can't you forgive, too?

It's not a new story, is it? It's our story. And – its part of God's story. We heard it in other words from the Scriptures this morning. It's 'Peter's story, and it's Paul's. And in many ways its our story, too.

Life is full of things, so many things, that seem unfair, that are unfair. Cruel and Heartless, truth betraying, joy robbing, life destroying things.

Virginia Tech – and the families immediately impacted with such grief - and a bit more of our confidence in life can ebb away. The copycat acts that have followed – and we despair a bit more. Like the man in the internet Story – we carry our own burdens and woes and worries and sadnesses - And – our own load of guilts.... Too.

And we find it all hardening our hearts - scarring our souls - squeezing out some measures of our trust, our hope, our faith... and our ability to Love...

Peter played his part in this our human drama. And Peter found, greater than his worries or his guilt, Peter found God's new life giving word of grace and forgiveness, and a call to love even as Peter found himself to be loved.

Three times the Risen Christ asked Peter - Peter do you love me? Peter do you love me? Peter do you love me. Three times, even as Peter had denied Jesus. And three times Jesus called Peter to share the love that changes everything.

And Paul, who was called Saul, before God in Christ called him from works of death to spread the word of life, the word of truth and goodness and love..

Paul saw the faith of those followers of Christ he captured and persecuted, saw their love of God more than life itself, and Paul's life was turned upside down. Love - God's love in Christ, and that love in the lives of Christ's followers - changed everything for Paul. Blinded by his misplaced loyalty to Jewish Law, he missed the wonder of God's love for God's people.

Until, truly blind, he received the loving care of those he sought to snare. Love changed everything in Paul's life, and through his life and ministry, changed the world.. Love changes everything. Or... does it?

Prejudice, anger, hatred, violence, dishonesty, betrayal, senseless death - all this marked our human journey long before Jesus Christ. And in spite of Jesus Christ it can sometimes seem as if nothing has happened to change the picture. Wars and rumors of war. Senseless violence. Lives wasted...then...now. What is this thing called Easter Hope? A week after Easter - and - Virginia Tech.

And just off stage - Don Imus and his hateful talk. And always - still - Iraq, and Iraq and Iraq.

But - there was a shift, there was a change. The temple curtain was torn in two that first Good Friday, and the face of God did shine through. The light of love, God's love, in Jesus the Christ, forever changed our view of life and death.

And all the darkness that still stains the human scene, cannot keep the light of love from shining through. Though we seem at times to want to revel in the worst and not the best of what we humans do, by the media pressing the darkest of our deeds upon ourselves, still the light and truth and power of love shines through..

There was the image, too little shared, of a funeral last year in Pennsylvania, where half the crowd of people at Charles Robert's grave were Amish family members or neighbors of the five girls he killed.

Those Amish folk built no memorial at the school house site - but turned the land back to farming - and proclaimed their forgiveness of the man. They did not sow a whirlwind of revenge - that - truth be said - does reap a whirlwind of its own.

Instead those Amish folk took at full face value the words of Jesus prayer - the one we say each week, and need to seek to live more fully each day. "For give us as we forgive others."

Would that after 9/11 we had found such grace. Could ever a nation under God live by such a rule - a rule of love? And this week - is it a sign of hope? a nation ringing bells, and in prayer, or simple Silence, on Friday - willing love and not hate to rule in the wake of Monday's tragedy. There is the Easter Hope.

It lives. For we have heard the word of God's redeeming work of love in Jesus Christ. We have heard the words of his forgiving love from a Cross, and we have seen the wonder of death denied, hate crucified, love reborn. Lives turned right side up by God's amazing grace at work across the years. It is the heart of what we say and seek to do here -

But maybe our word of Care is not strong enough to move us as far forward in faith as we should go. Maybe we should say our mission is to love Christ, and love the Church, and love the world in which God has given us to live.

Maybe so... if we remember the symbol of our care and our love. It is the wonder and the power of the simple symbol of our faith. It is the cross we gladly bear and seek to share.

For the shadow of its image crosses out every mean and awful thing in life with the message of God's forgiving new life giving love. Love that changes everything. Yes - lift high the cross, the love of God proclaim, til all the world adore his sacred name, and his way and his truth and his love. Amen.

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