

This Will Be a Sign: #morelove

Luke 2:1-20

December 20, 2020

It is a night just like all the rest as the shepherds watch the fields for shadows, alert for predators that might harm their flock of sheep. The crisp night air is helpful in keeping them awake. Suddenly instead of the shadow of a wolf, the shepherds are startled by a bright light in the sky. A voice comes from the light declaring that the long-awaited Messiah has arrived. The light in the sky is magnified as a multitude of voices sing praise to God for this new sign. One would expect such a majestic display in the sky to be the sign – a grand, bold clue about God’s presence. But instead, the angel declares that the sign is a newborn helpless babe in a manger, who has come just like us, to be one of us.

It is not what we expect of God. We understand God to be all-powerful, so we anticipate the coming of a superhero or mighty warrior puffed up with strength and force. But that’s not the way God arrives. God comes as a powerless infant, born in a feeding trough for animals. This surprising sign shows us that power and force will not save us. It is love that will save us.

Like baby Jesus, each of us was born in original blessing. We are blessed by the love of God from the moment of our conception. Love is where you came from, and love is where you are going and God wants us to experience that love every moment in between. Love is not something that you can attain. It’s not something you can work up to, as much as something you allow yourself to fall into! It is the living presence of God within you, who has already fallen in love with you and which bids you to fall in love with God and with your true self.

You can’t make God love you one ounce more than God already loves you right now. You can go to church every day for the rest of your life, but God isn’t going to love you any more than God already loves you right now. You cannot make God love you any less, either – not an ounce less. You could do the most terrible thing and God won’t love you any less. However, you would probably love yourself much less. You cannot diminish God’s love for you. What you can do is learn how to believe it, receive it, trust it, allow it, and celebrate it. You cannot change God’s mind about you! God loves you unconditionally!ⁱ

Sadly, most of us have forgotten this original blessing. Our ego has convinced us that we need power and control to merit God’s love. Fearful that we are not lovable, we fall into “one-upmanship.” Fear tells us, “I have to be better than you to feel worthy.” Fear says, “I must use power and control to gain

the approval I need.” But I John 4:18 proclaims, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”

Fear drives us to construct barriers that segregate the loveable from the unlovable. In first century society, the shepherds were in the unlovable category, according to human standards. They were despised as outcasts, scorned for allowing their sheep to graze on neighboring land. Nevertheless, God chose them to be the first recipients of Jesus’ birth announcement and the first outside the family to meet the baby Jesus. God’s love disregards the judgments we humans tend to establish. In God’s eyes, we are all loveable.

The angels say, “Do not be afraid, for God has come to you, lowly shepherds. In God’s eyes, everyone matters.” God comes as a vulnerable human being, just like you, to be a brother to all creation. God’s perfect love dismantles the false barriers that humans establish. God’s love is unconditional. It is not based on merit, good deeds, or willingness to reciprocate. God loves you simply because you are alive.

A recent news story told of a blind cross-country athlete in West Fork, Arkansas. Paul Scott, a freshman, is legally blind, but he runs on his high school cross-country team thanks to his running guide, 11 year-old Rebel Hayes. Tethered by a cord and bound at the heart with love, for three years Rebel has guided Paul over hills and across finish lines. Their coach understands that we are called to love and serve others. She recruited running guides not only for Paul, but also for his two older siblings. Paul’s mom is grateful that her son has found not only a guide in Rebel, but also a genuine friendship with a peer.ⁱⁱ This unique relationship has broken barriers and empowered both teens to excel in ways that affirm their unique worth.

God comes in Jesus to be a companion like that, to tether himself to our side, to remind us of the original blessing into which we are born. Love is where you come from, and love is where you are going and everywhere in between you are carried in love. The baby Jesus grows to tell us that there is enough love for everyone. We need not parcel it out. That’s why we are commissioned to be share the good news that there is more love, for love is the sign of God with us in Jesus the Christ.

Divine Lover, You sent your Beloved Son, Jesus, to draw us to you like magnets, holding us fast with the bond of love. You birth us in love and desire to carry us in love throughout our days. We confess that sometimes we turn from you and your love. We try to be self-sufficient, powerful and in control. We don’t

like being vulnerable or in need of anything. But it does feel so good to be loved. We acknowledge that we do need your love, for you know us through and through and love us anyway. May your love seep deep into our souls, especially into the cracks and crevasses where we feel unworthy or unlovable. We are astounded by the great good news of Jesus that You love without condition or merit. We pause to breathe in your love....

Touched by your love, we are compelled to share it. Grow our compassion for those who feel unlovable or unloved. Extend our hearts as you enlarge your heart to offer love without condition.

Embrace all who long for good news – news that a loved one is recovering from illness; news that a home will be restored after fire; hope that a broken relationship can be reconciled. We pray for all yearning for salvation from the multiple disasters striking people today.

In Jesus, you come to be one with us. We pray your healing, guiding presence would be with all who live with chronic health conditions, all who are overcome with illness or other life. Abide with those who feel the painful absence of loved ones, blessing their hearts with comfort.

As Christ is born anew, may his presence fill this church and your church universal with his presence of peace and justice. Embolden us to be messengers of the hope, peace, joy, and love which the world so longs to hear. We open ourselves to Christ's rebirth in our hearts and in our lives. Come, Emmanuel, Come.

We unite our voices as Jesus taught us, together praying...

ⁱ Richard Rohr, "God Is For Us," September 30, 2016, Center for Action and Contemplation, www.cac.org.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/video/blind-cross-country-athlete-and-running-guide-s-lasting-bond-96799301971>