

Arise and Show God's Love

The Rev. Sarah Dunn
St. David's Episcopal Church, Wayne, PA
September 1, 2024
Pentecost 15, Proper 17

May I speak to the name of the one God, lover, beloved, love. Amen.

Rev. Sarah Dunn (00:05):

Please be seated, my friends. I want you to this morning take a moment to ponder an instant in time, a memory when you felt completely and fully and wholeheartedly love. Hold onto that moment of when you were overflowing with love. Perhaps it was when you held your newborn infant in your arms after nine months of waiting. Perhaps you felt that love on your wedding day, knees shaking, grasping your beloved's hands as tightly as possible wondering when people will stop staring at you. Perhaps you felt loved when a friend at school stood up to your bully and reminded you of your worth and dignity in this world. Perhaps you felt loved when you came to your family and friends and admitted that you love someone who was different than who they had chosen for you. Whether that is due to race or country of origin or age or sexual orientation or gender identity, perhaps you felt love in that moment for being accepted for who God created you to be in this world.

(01:48):

My friends, hold onto that moment of when you felt that much love. And I want you to consider how it felt in your body, that emotion of love. Because in my experience, love is like this love poem from Song of Solomon today, Arise, My Love. I find when I am in the throes of love that I hold my head up a little higher. My shoulders are back, my chest is out, and I can't help but smile. I can't help but share that love with other people. I can't help but allow the light to shine. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us, "Arise, shine, for your light has come. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." When we engage with love, which is what we are called to do as disciples, right? Jesus, I think we all remember the Great Commandment. If you don't, here's your reminder. You shall love the Lord your God with all your...

Congregation (03:06):

Heart.

Rev. Sarah Dunn (03:07):

With all your...

Congregation (03:08):

Soul.

Rev. Sarah Dunn (03:08):

With all your...

Congregation (03:09):

Mind.

Rev. Sarah Dunn (03:09):

With all your...

Congregation (03:10):

Strength.

Rev. Sarah Dunn (03:11):

Strength, yeah. Yeah. And you shall love your neighbor as...

Congregation (03:17):

Yourself.

Rev. Sarah Dunn (03:18):

Good job, friends. You passed. I'm so proud of you. You can graduate to the next grade this school year. We as Christians, as disciples of The Holy One, are called to love. We are called to be outpouring, flourishing, abundance of God's love in this world. That is our calling, that is our purpose, that is our vocation, full stop. And when we see that someone in our midst has not experienced love because of broken systems or because of dysfunctional families, because I don't know about you, we all have some dysfunctionality in our families, or because of school dynamics or workplace dynamics or whatever it is, we are called to respond by encourage them to be lifted up. Encourage them to arise, to flourish, to live into their fullest self, most authentic self as God has created them to be in this world.

(04:14):

And we here at St. David's praise God. We do that work. We do that work with Family Promise, right? When you saw Emily Given and Devin Anderson do their long little song and dance in the announcements last week, if anyone was here, we do that work by housing those struggling with housing insecurity, right? And naming that their housing does not dictate their worth in this world. That they too are beloved by God and beloved by disciples of The Holy One. We do that work as we engage with the young people at St. David's Episcopal Day School when we remind the youngest among us that they are loved by God just as they are created them to be, and all their quirks and eccentricities and moving frenetic energy bodies are welcome here. They're welcome here at St. David's just as God made them. And where they are in their developmental cycle, they are loved and whole and welcome.

(05:18):

We do that in our work with Project [inaudible 00:05:22], reminding young girls abroad that they can go to school with proper women's hygiene products. We, the people of St. David's, work on lifting up the lowly, as Mother Mary reminds us in her song of praise. And I don't know about you, but sometimes I struggle with love. Anyone else in here? Yeah. We are broken, limited human beings. Sometimes, we don't always love to the fullest. Sometimes, we're not always arising and letting love flow to the next individual in our midst. Sometimes, as the letter from James reminds us, we get angry, we get judgmental, we get envious, and we create barriers between ourselves and other children of God, right? We do that. I don't want to say woe is us, but we have to remind ourselves we do it in order to move forward in a healthier way, right?

(06:33):

Sometimes, we make mistakes. Sometimes, we judge another person based on their class or their race or the neighborhood they come from or the church they go to, or how many generations of their family

have lived on the main line, right? Sometimes, we, instead of wanting the flourishing for another human being, instead of wanting them to live into their identity just as God has created them to be in this world, eccentricities and all, instead, we often want to put people in a box, right? We want to confine people with cultural restraints, with societal norms. And I know we all know that in this time and place.

[\(07:20\)](#):

It's easy to fall into that trap because that's the way the world wants us to think, is that you are only lovable if you do X, Y, and Z. You are only lovable if you teach a certain way and walk a certain way and hang out with certain people. But let me remind you, Jesus hung out with a band of misfits. You are only lovable if you go to this school or buy this car or wear this name-brand clothing. You are only lovable if this and this and this and that and the other and X, Y, and Z.

[\(07:59\)](#):

But the reality is, my friends, that as this love poem from Song of Song reminds us, is that The Holy One loves us unconditionally. The Holy One, our God, and Jesus Christ wants our flourishing, wants our wholeness, our fullness, our most authentic selves to be present, heads held high, chests uplifted, shoulders back in this world. Our God wants that for each and every one of us sitting in these pews, for each and every person here at St. David's, in the community of Wayne, the main line, Greater Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the United States. Every child of God that is on this planet, God loves the biodiversity that is humanity. God loves it all. And we too as disciples are to create space for this mutual flourishing of creation. We are called to make space for those who are the other, for those who are different than ourselves, and to love them unconditionally as our God loves us.

[\(09:10\)](#):

And y'all, that love is going to make us uncomfortable. I hope my husband doesn't hate me for this, but I love Bradley Cullen Perry, but sometimes, I have three teenage kids, y'all, and sometimes, sometimes I fall short in loving, right? We all fall short in loving. Love is challenging. Love can feel heartbreaking. Love can feel overwhelming sometimes. And we hear that in the Song of Songs today in the Song of Solomon because there's a recognition that winter has been here, right? There has been a rainy season. There has been winter even later in this book, which I encourage you to read this beautiful love poem if you've never read it, it's awesome. But later in the book, in chapter five, we hear the watchmen don't want this love story to happen. In chapter eight, we hear that her brothers don't want this love story to happen.

[\(10:06\)](#):

There are going to be hurdles. There are going to be obstacles. There are going to be moments and times that try to set us back from loving, that try to trick us into stepping back into those boxes that our culture has created for ourselves. But again, The Holy One wants our mutual flourishing, my friends. The Holy One wants abundance for all of us. And if we forget that, if you showed up this summer, just remember all of that bread of life discourse from John's Gospel. We had a lot of bread this summer, y'all. And that whole discourse starts with the feeding of the multitudes, where God takes a few loaves and fishes and somehow, miraculously, there is enough to go around. My friends, there is enough to go around. There is enough for every human being to live into their fullest self, their fullest potential, their image and likeness of God that dwells within each and every one of us.

[\(11:24\)](#):

And the question is, will we allow love of our neighbor to transform us, to change us, to take the ways that we have become rigid and rule followers and laying down the letter of the law and allow ourselves to become open-hearted and compassionate and welcoming of the other? Because we hear in today's gospel account that the Pharisees and the scribes, the religious elders, which, hate to break it to you,

y'all, we're now the religious elders 2,000 years later. The religious elders have said that the disciples are unworthy. The disciples are lacking. The disciples are unlovable by God because they eat with defiled hands. And Jesus reminds them it's not about the rules. It's not about the letter of the law. It's not about whether you eat with defiled hands or keep kosher or heal on the Sabbath. It's about do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? And do you love your neighbor as yourself?

([12:29](#)):

That's all it's about, my friends, love, abundant, steadfast, outpouring of God's love in this world. And we're going to encounter challenges as the St. David's community, are we not? We're going to encounter obstacles and hurdles along the way that are going to encourage us to grow in different directions. I pray that with our new rector, Rick, that we grow in new and abundant and joyful, playful, delightful directions of love. And we can either choose to remain the same or we can follow Jesus. We can follow a God who modeled positive change in our lives. He modeled positive change because from death comes resurrection, right?

([13:26](#)):

From pain and suffering comes joy and new life. Jesus modeled that, with love, positive change, transformation is truly possible. So my friends, as we welcome our new rector, as we soon enter a new program year and school year, as we welcome new individuals into our congregation, as we continue to discern how we are called to be Christ's hands and feet in this world, may we arise. May we show forth God's love to everyone we encounter in our midst. Please respond to each phrase with, "Thanks be to God." For all that has been, thanks be to God.

Congregation ([14:21](#)):

Thanks be to God.

Rev. Sarah Dunn ([14:22](#)):

For all that is, thanks be to God.

Congregation ([14:24](#)):

Thanks be to God.

Rev. Sarah Dunn ([14:25](#)):

And for all that will be, thanks be...

Congregation ([14:27](#)):

Thanks be to God.

Rev. Sarah Dunn ([14:28](#)):

Amen.

Congregation ([14:28](#)):

Amen.