

“Down to Earth Love”  
Philippians 2:1-5

We just finished our Thanksgiving celebration with all the fun and challenge of being with family and friends for an extended period of time. Some of you here might be really grateful that this time together is over because of the arguments or emotional cuts one experiences during such gatherings. Even though the time is supposed to be an occasion for reconnection and fun, the political divides often find their way into our time with family members, especially those who disagree with our worldview. In 2016, a family decided to make a funny video about how to deal with the stress of Thanksgiving Dinner with family members who disagree:

[https://youtu.be/vfe\\_uYKtV1A](https://youtu.be/vfe_uYKtV1A)

We all have our techniques when it comes to such times of arguments. Here are some of them: Distraction, avoidance, blame, intimidation, confrontation, or using facts to defend our point of view. The reality is that no matter what technique we use (argument or avoidance ones), our divisions end up hurting us instead of solving the problems we seek to deal with.

Here is Brené Brown on how this kind of division hurts us:

<https://youtu.be/INRbrCRbxk8>

God knows this and seeks to show us a better way to live. But God does not do it through an argument or by imposing God’s vision on us. Instead, God builds a relationship of love with us to help us live into a new way of being and seeing. In the story of the birth of Jesus, we have one of the most powerful examples of this kind of love. God enters into our human experience not because God agrees with us or thinks that we are doing a great job living up to our full potential. What matters to God is love. In the birth of Jesus God gives us an incredible example of the power of the kind of love that will heal the world.

In our Bible reading for today, we hear from the apostle Paul about the example of this love and how it challenges us to do the same. At face value, this kind of invitation is daunting. How could we possibly have the same mind and same love? How is it even possible to be of one mind? We know how difficult that is for us, even within one church or one family. Our different experiences and perspectives often end up separating us. I think the key to living by the wisdom of God about love is to look at the manger and to see that love is something deeper than any of our human divisions. Love is about beholding the sacred in every moment and in every person.

In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul was trying to help them see that the love which God embodies in and through us can heal our cultural divisions and pain. Paul was very aware of the cultural conditioning of the Philippians. He knew how they saw the world through the lens of the Roman Empire, a world where the rich and powerful were seen as blessed by the gods, while the rest were seen as destined to a life of misery and submission to the will of the elite. The Apostle Paul challenged the followers of Jesus to

see the world as Jesus saw it. He challenged them to let God's view of the world reshape their vision of life and society. In fact, one of the powerful images which Paul uses is inviting the followers of Jesus to have the mind of Christ. Paul saw that following the way of Christ was not just a religious idea or a belief system. He saw it as a radical **way of the heart** that has the power to reshape our minds, our actions, and our world into the way of Christ. He knew that in order to make the vision of Christ a reality in the world, a collective change heart needed to happen.

Here are a few things for us to remember as we seek to follow God's "Down to Earth" way of love, the way of the heart (based on the work of Mike Slaughter and Rachel Billups in *Down to Earth*):

1. **Love Is the Gift of God in Us:** Love is about allowing the love of God to grow in our hearts. The more love we experience deep within us, the more we are able to love others. One of the things I appreciate about contemplative prayer, especially the prayers of silence with others, is that we can feel the bond we have with God and with one another without even speaking. The same is true when people are serving together. When we are doing the work of love, we connect with others beyond any of the barriers that normally separate us.
2. **Love Is an Invitation to Relationship:** Rachel Billups writes, "we must realize that we don't have to agree to agree...Christians were labeled, branded, because of how well they loved one another. They loved one another so much that they were willing to die for each other." One of my colleagues in ministry used to say often, "we don't have to think alike to love alike." Love is ultimately about our connection to God and to others which can never be broken.
3. **Love is a Covenant of Commitment:** Billups writes, "The first Jesus followers treated their commitment to Jesus as a covenant, much like a marriage covenant...Followers of Jesus do not have to win to win...What would happen if this Advent we made ourselves second, not only to God but to those around us? For the debates we find ourselves in, maybe it would mean using 'yes, and,' more than 'no, but.'"

One of the ways we can embody this kind of love is by learning to listen better. Listening is a lost art in our fast paced and opinionated world. Today, we are going to practice a listening exercise that you can take with you to any relationship, with people you know well or people you are just meeting. It is from Eric Law's work. The guidelines are outlined on the piece of paper you received today. Find a partner and let them tell you something about themselves (limit it to 2 minutes). The Listener's role is to: 1. Be Curious 2. Ask Clarifying Questions 3. Let the person know you have been listening by giving feedback (non-judgmental).

What did you notice? How did it feel to be heard like this? Would this kind of listening be possible when someone shares with you something you totally disagree with? Can you practice this kind of listening this week with someone you don't know well, but you see periodically?

This down to earth love is not easy or simple because we often forget its wisdom and have to be reminded of it. Our broken relationships, our need for approval, our self-righteousness, our insistence (and assumption) that we are always right, our competition for resources, our petty disagreements, our vulnerable bodies, and our internal fears are huge obstacles for us to live by the story of love. And they can't be overcome through our intellectual abilities. What they need is to be transformed through the power of love. In the story of the birth of Jesus, we are invited to enter into this domain of love. As Mike Slaughter puts it, "In Jesus, we have the picture of a God who intentionally positions [Godself] as a mere servant, identifying with the lowest of the lows, the least, and the lost... Take heart! Immanuel, God with us, is about to birth a new thing in you and through you."

I would like to end with a song that expresses this spirit of down to earth love. The song "Somewhere" is sung by the Refugee Chorus from Maine. It is a group of girls from 22 countries who try to spread a message and a vision of hope and peace. The song is soulfully delivered by Shy, an 11-year-old former refugee from Namibia: <https://youtu.be/Ks6C4QkmEWk>. Amen.