

“MOSES: I – THIS IS LOVE”
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Exodus 1:8-2:10

Mark 2:1-5

Today is February 10th, which means four days from now is Valentine’s Day. Have you made any plans yet? The stores are waiting for you. They’ve got cards ready to sell you, candy ready for you to share with someone you love, the perfect flowers to deliver on your behalf, and no doubt, restaurants all over are eager to seat you at one of their tables. ‘Tis the season for love, and all over the television this week you’ll be able to watch every romantic comedy that’s ever been made. I’m pretty sure if you watch the Hallmark channel you’ll see wonderful love stories where the guy gets the girl and everything ends up sweetness and light, every time.

And that’s wonderful, but maybe not very realistic. You know, when I meet with couples in premarital counseling, one of the questions I ask them is about how they argue. What I want to know is how, when they have disagreements, they work through them. One of the worst answers they can give me is that they never argue or disagree with each other, because every honest relationship, where the people are being their true selves, has its ups and downs.

Love isn’t always sweetness and light, all the time. There are many different faces to love, many different kinds of love. And we see a lot of them in today’s scripture lessons.

Look at the gospel lesson – it’s a story of love between friends. It’s a story of love that will stop at nothing to help the other person. You heard it read. A man was sick and his friends knew Jesus was in town, and so wanted their friend to be healed that they took him to Jesus. Trouble was, mobs of other people did the same thing that day. So when they got there, these friends were distressed to see that there seemed to be no possible way to get their friend to Jesus.

They could have turned around and taken him home. But they loved him too much to do that. They loved him boldly and deeply, and so committed were they to his well-being that they did something pretty crazy. They took him up on a roof and lowered him through the roof right to the feet of Jesus. Now, those are some friends, and that is some love – a love that doesn’t take “no” for an answer when it comes to getting help for a friend. A love that fights for someone else, that will do whatever it takes to get a friend what he or she needs.

Turn to the lesson from Exodus and we see a number of different kinds of love. This is the story of Moses, and the early days of his life. You heard the back

story. Pharaoh was so threatened by the Israelites that he declared that all male Hebrew children should be killed at birth.

Enter the first portrait of love, as shown by the Hebrew midwives. Their names were Shiprah and Puah, and though they knew well the edict from Pharaoh, they did not obey it. Because they loved the Lord and the ones he loved more than they feared Pharaoh. They loved those precious children and they risked their lives to save those little ones. And when they were questioned, they came up with an excuse about Hebrew women delivering quickly, before they could get there, and apparently Pharaoh fell for it.

You know, their disobedience could have cost them their own lives, yet, out of love for God, and love for those babies, they did the right thing. That kind of love is risky love, love that goes out on a limb, and does the right thing, despite the cost, despite the risk.

Moses' mother shows us yet another kind of love. She, too, knew the evil intent of Pharaoh. She, too, knew that her son's life was deemed worthless by this despotic ruler, so her sole aim was to protect her baby and keep him alive. Which she did for as long as she could, until finally she knew she could hide him no longer, and she put him in that basket, set him on the waters, and left him in the hands of God – for God to make a way. It's hard to fathom the courage that took for her to do that – to care more about him, than about her desire to keep him. That's sacrificial love, and it makes me think of the countless mothers over the years who have given their babies up for adoption, knowing that they couldn't care for their little ones. It's heartbreaking, yet a portrait of sacrificial love. That was the love of Moses' mother.

And then, there was his sister. She too loved Moses deeply. She watched as her mother, in essence, gave up her son. But her love took on another dimension. She wasn't going to give up the fight for her brother. She was going to make sure he was cared for, and cared for by those who loved him the most.

She had to be patient, because first another act of love had to come. This time it came from a most unlikely source – the daughter of Pharaoh. The scripture tells us that she was out for a walk down by the water, and came upon the basket floating on the water in which was baby Moses. When she saw him, her heart must have melted a little, because we're told she had pity on him, even knowing he was a Hebrew boy. Amazingly, she kept him. Think of that, will you? The daughter of the one who said all male Hebrew babies should be killed, taking home a Hebrew baby boy? What kind of love is that? A love willing to risk everything, including the wrath of her father. A love that cares more for a vulnerable baby than the cost she might have to pay.

Oh, before I forget, let's go back to Moses' sister. Remember how I said she was going to make sure he was cared for – well, she put herself in the right place at the right time, so that when Pharaoh's daughter found Moses, she rose up and offered to find a woman to nurse him for her, an offer which Pharaoh's daughter accepted, and lo and behold, the woman his sister found was his very own mother. Proof that love can find a way.

Love comes in all different forms, friends. Sometimes it is sweet and syrupy, and we all love it when it is. But sometimes it's not. Sometimes love is hard work – sometimes it asks us to go the extra mile like those friends of the paralyzed man; or to do no to what is wrong and do the right thing like those midwives; or sacrifice what we want for what is best for someone else, like Moses' mother; or take risks for love like the daughter of Pharaoh; or be a partner with God in making a way, like Moses' sister did.

Love comes in all different forms, but one thing is for sure. It's love to which we are called. It's love we're called to live. Love is a mark of discipleship, a sure sign to others that we are children of God, and disciples of Christ. We sing a hymn sometimes called "They'll Know We are Christians By Our Love," and it's absolutely true.

Writer James Moore put it this way, "Christ came into the world to show us how concerned God is, how much God cares, how deeply God loves – and he sends us out into the world so that we may love and care for people in the same self-giving way." (James W. Moore, *If God Has a Refrigerator, Your Picture is On It*, "Celebrating God's Unconditional Love," p. 46)

Oh my dear friends, the world in which we live needs our love. They need to see love – the sweet, syrupy kind, and all the other kinds – committed, sacrificial, risking, courageous – all kinds of love. And we can show them, because we have first been loved by God himself in all those ways too.

In those mountaintop experiences in our lives, we have known that sweet, ever-present love of God. But we've also known, in the experiences of our lives, God's committed, risking, courageous love on our behalf, and most of all, we've seen God's sacrificial love on that cross at Calvary.

So in this Valentine's Day week, I pray that you will think a lot about love – not just the love between you and that special someone, if that's the case for you, but love in general. Be on the lookout for all the love that comes at you this week – yes, from the one or ones closest to you, but be aware too of the love that comes at you in other ways.

Maybe it will be a co-worker that surprises you with a cup of coffee. Or maybe it will be a driver that lets you pull out in front of them. Maybe it will be a child holding your hand, or a neighbor waving hello. Maybe it happened today when someone sat with you here in this room, or gave you a hug of support when you came in.

Love is all around us, folks – all kinds of love. Thank God for the portraits of love revealed in this morning's lessons, helping us to see love in all its fullness and complexity. And thank God, most of all, for the greatest act of love ever, the giving of his Son for us and our salvation.

As you come to communion this morning, I pray that those you love will be on your heart and in your mind, that you will ask God to help you be more loving, that you will say "Here I Am, Lord" when opportunities to love come your way, and most of all, when you hold the bread and the juice, I pray that you'll remember the love that will never let you go, the love of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior.

May it be so.

Amen.