

A New Vision

Psalm 65

1 John 4:7-21

Nov 22, 2020

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

Psalm 65

Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed, O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come. When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions. Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might. You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Know your why.

Several years ago I attended a workshop that focused on the importance of knowing your 'why.' The key message was that if you know your 'why', then you find the motivation, endurance, and even courage to achieve the goals you have set. At the core of the presenter's message were the words of German philosopher Frederick Nietzsche, 'He who has a 'why' can endure any 'how'. Knowing your 'why' is an essential first step in setting and then achieving the goals that are meaningful to you, excite and energize you, even when there are challenges that confront you, and risks to be taken. When your 'why' is at the center of your thinking, your planning, you have a clearer sense of purpose and meaning while not being pulled aside by distractions or ill fitting ideas.

Author Margie Warrell offers this insight, "If you've ever faced a significant crisis in your life you'll have experienced the power of purpose to tap reserves of energy, determination and courage you likely didn't know you had. Your mission was clear. Your goal was compelling. Your focus was laser-like. Your potential was tapped. The power of purpose is similar to the energy of light focused through a magnifying glass. Diffused light has little use, but when its energy is concentrated—as through a magnifying glass—that same light can set fire to paper. Focus its energy even more, as with a laser beam, and it has the power to cut through steel. Likewise, a clear sense of purpose enables you to focus your efforts on what matters most, compelling you to take risks and push forward regardless of the odds or obstacles."

There is a video clip that captures this simply and beautifully. In it, a music teacher was asked to sing the opening stanzas from "Amazing Grace." His baritone voice was stunning, the hymn was flawless. After his performance was praised and appreciated, the music teacher was then asked to sing it again, but this time he was asked to imagine a scenario of true appreciation, such as a family member being released from prison. Not surprisingly, the second performance far outshone the first. This time, the song was performed with added feeling and emotion, the tone deeper and richer, and the words more spirited. As the presenter said, "When you know your 'why' then your 'what' has more impact, because you're working towards your purpose." Leadership expert Simon Sinek calls this "the golden circle." He says that it's not enough to know what you do and how you do it. At our essence, we are most motivated by knowing 'why' we do things. And it's through that awareness that we can best connect with others.

As Christians, our 'why' is clear. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

From the moment we are born until the moment we die; every second, every minute, hour, day, month, year and decade, we are God's beloved. Over and over we have times and experiences to remember this love, especially to be reminded when we lose sight of that love, when we feel lost, drifting, disconnected. Over and over we have times and experiences to learn to love others as God loves us, to be the most loving person that we can be.

What are some moments when you have truly felt beloved of God, when you felt the presence of God at the Communion table or baptismal font, the divine creative artist in the beauty of the moment, in the touch of someone beloved in your life, in the calming of a personal storm, in the relief as an ordeal fades to the past, in the words of hope and comfort said at just the

right time, in the absolute conviction that you were exactly where you needed to be, or in the overwhelming sense of peace and acceptance when you least expected it?

This is in part what John is inviting us to see through his words, “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God,” as that is just the beginning. Knowing, truly and deeply knowing, that we are God’s beloved calls us out to respond by the love we show to others, to those we know, to those we will never meet, and even to those we find hard to love, because God’s love is for everyone. Our experience of God’s love shapes the love we bring into the world, how we have been loved calls us out to love others in the same ways.

In this season of Stewardship, in this season of Thanksgiving, we are also in the midst of a season of pandemic, a time of losses and limits we have never known, and only months ago could not have imagined. Yet we have the power of purpose to tap reserves of energy, determination and courage for a clear mission and a compelling goal because we know our ‘why.’ God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

Individually we know that we are God’s Beloved, and reflect that love back out into the world in our prayers, our commitments, our pledges, our ways of expressing thanksgiving and gratitude, and our personal ways of out reach and service. Together, as a church, as Smith Memorial Church, United Church of Christ, we collectively know that we are God’s Beloved, and we reflect that love back out in the community, and far beyond. Why? We have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also, and we do this because we are motivated by God’s love that gives us energy, hope, and purpose to focus our efforts on what matters most, on a clear mission and a compelling goal, even though how we do so is different for now. Knowing our ‘why’ means our ‘what’ has more impact, because we are working towards God’s purpose.

On the pledge cards that reflect our gratitude and commitment sent by mail rather than placed in the offering plate in the sanctuary, and in the unique Thanksgiving celebrations crowned with God’s bounty this year in which our guest list is smaller, while our hearts and spirits remain filled with love, why we do so is crystal clear, God is love. Amen.