



RECKLESS LOVE

August 12, 2018, Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost

Psalm 130

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¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.
²Lord, hear my voice!

Charles H. Spurgeon wrote, “The depths usually silence all they engulf, but they could not close the mouth of this servant of the Lord; on the contrary, it was in the abyss itself that he cried unto Jehovah. Beneath the floods prayer lived and struggled; yea, above the roar of the billows rose the cry of faith. It little matters where we are if we can pray; but prayer is never more real and acceptable than when it rises out of the worst places. Deep places beget deep devotion. Depths of earnestness are stirred by depths of tribulation. Diamonds sparkle most amid the darkness.”

As many of you know, a large group of Brick Church youth and I went on another mission trip this past June. There were twenty-five of us in total and it was definitely another successful and life-changing trip. The trip to Fairbanks, Alaska started with some chaos at the check-in desk at JFK, as if you couldn't have guessed that JFK didn't have its act together, which then led to us having to run down the terminal to our gate, before we could settle into our seats for our long journey to Alaska. Nevertheless, it was worth every bit of that stress and the long day of travel. It was worth every bit of it.

We arrived at the Door of Hope Church, where we would be staying in Fairbanks, in plenty of time to set up our beds, wash the travel off our faces, eat dinner and



have an orientation meeting before our first worship service of the week together. Not that timing necessarily mattered, considering it was light out nearly 24 hours a day when we were there.

Anyway, on that first night, during that first worship service, we learned that the theme of the week would be “Reckless Love.” Therefore, in many ways I thought that we would be getting away with a relatively easy, mild and straightforward theological topic, but boy was I wrong. On our next day in Alaska, we began to dive into the topic of God’s endless, boundless and reckless love. This is something we **have** spoken with the youth about often here at the church and which we have learned we clearly cannot speak about enough.

Then, on Monday morning, before we began our first day of work, we started our day with some alone time, some one-on-one time with God, and reading about the topic of God’s love in our morning devotionals. Then, after spending some time with God, we split into two groups and headed out to our work sites.

Some of us spent the morning working on building new homes, some clearing brush away from old ones, and still others sanding the side of another. Then, at lunchtime, each group had a discussion about God’s expansive and “reckless” love. The topic went well and as per usual, it took a little warming up in order for the kids to begin sharing their opinions and insights. After lunch, we all went back to work and enjoyed learning new construction skills while working hard on our houses. And everyone got to know each other more by telling jokes, laughing, singing and dancing while working their hearts out.

Following our full day of work, we headed to the local high school to take showers and get cleaned up for dinner and worship. That evening, during the worship service, as we watched a video and as the preacher spoke, I looked around, saw several tear-filled eyes and tear-stained t-shirts. And I wasn’t quite sure what to make of it, as it was only the beginning of the trip, the prelude, the introduction.



Then, not long after the service was over and we were entering into a brief stretch of free time before bed, a student approached me and asked me if it was true. But I wasn't sure what she meant exactly. So I asked, "Is what true?" And she asked, "Is it true that God loves me that much?" Wow! I thought we'd told her that a million times.

So I told her that He loves her even more than that. More than any video or preacher or I could ever tell her or show her. That precious child of God was crying to God, because she believed she had done things in her life that she thought separated her from God's love. But that's the kicker, isn't it? She didn't. She couldn't. God loves her just the way she is and He wants nothing more than for her to love Him back and to do her best, that's it.

So the week started deep and it continued deep. We went from wondering about the extent of God's love in the first couple of days of the trip, to in-depth conversations of what it means to ask for forgiveness, what it means to be forgiven, and what it means to be loved...

As the psalmist had said:

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!
³If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
⁴But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

Spurgeon also wrote about God's forgiveness when he said, "Free, full, sovereign pardon is in the hand of the great King; it is his prerogative to forgive, and he delights to exercise it. Because his nature is mercy, and because he has provided a sacrifice for sin, therefore forgiveness is with him for all that come to him confessing their sins."



The youth went from contemplating the topic of God's love to deliberating over the expansiveness of God's forgiveness, wondering how a just God could forgive some of the great atrocities people have committed. But they talked and talked and said that if the God we believe in is a God of love, then God is a forgiving God. They said things like, "Well, then how does God forgive?" "Who does God forgive?" "Why does God forgive?" And, "when does God forgive?"

Then these questions led to more questions, which then led to a discussion about confession, and what it means to confess our sins to God. How that when we confess our sins, our corruptions, our immoralities, when we miss the mark and make mistakes, we need to be earnest in asking for forgiveness of them.

It was so beautiful to hear them work these questions out in their conversations. They taught each other so much. They wholeheartedly wrestled with these topics, and they came to many great conclusions, because in many ways they were all crying out to the Lord. They were, and we were, and we are, all seeking God's love and God's forgiveness. And it was good for them to be reminded, and it's good for us to be reminded, that God loves us unconditionally, excessively, disproportionately, totally, undeservedly, and completely. God's love is greater than the East is from the West. God, our God, is a God of forgiveness, of mercy and of love.

And as those kids continued to dive deeper into these topics, you could feel their passion and their desire for God's love growing stronger and stronger.

⁵I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
⁶my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

They were like the old night watchmen, the guards sitting on the city wall, waiting for the safety of the sun to rise, and the danger of night to disappear as the sun



rose. They were waiting, searching, for the sun to rise, and they were seeing it rise again. Their souls had been waiting for God's love and God's forgiveness to wash over them again, and their hope was indeed rekindled. Their hope in God was reawakened more than those shepherds who were all alone, sitting out on a rock, in the wilderness of the hills, staying up all night watching over the sheep, waiting for the day to break and the wild beasts, the hunters and the thieves to crawl back to the dens where they came from.

Their hope grew stronger and stronger, more powerful and more palpable, and it was incredible to experience.

During the evening worship services, we were led in music by a band. The band was made up of a synthesizer, bass guitar, acoustic guitar and a lead singer and they led us in contemporary Christian songs. The songs were typically ones that you can find on the radio, like on K-Love here in the city or on Star 99.1 over in New Jersey. And it was powerful to hear our youth sing them with more and more gusto throughout the week.

One of those songs was new to all of us, it's entitled Reckless Love by Cory Asbury, and now that we've returned we can hardly turn the radio on and not hear it. It doesn't quite work for me to play it here during my sermon but I'm going to share the lyrics with you now and perhaps play it during coffee hour for you in case you are interested.

So imagine a room full of kids, who have been together for a few days in Alaska, working extremely hard in the heat, building new homes and helping recuperate an old one, all the while discussing the powerfulness, amazingness and recklessness of God's love. They have been hoping for, and finding, His love on this trip. And as the love, forgiveness and mercy of God had been growing inside of them, it was working itself up to a fever pitch. And one of the ways they let it out was by singing songs in worship at the top of their lungs. And so the song goes:



Before I spoke a word, You were singing over me
You have been so, so good to me
Before I took a breath, You breathed Your life in me
You have been so, so kind to me

Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine
I couldn't earn it, I don't deserve it, still You give Yourself away
Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God

When I was Your foe, still Your love fought for me
You have been so, so good to me
When I felt no worth, You paid it all for me
You have been so, so kind to me

There's no shadow You won't light up
Mountain You won't climb up
Coming after me
There's no wall You won't kick down
Lie You won't tear down
Coming after me.

Just try to imagine a full room of Brick Church high schoolers, college aged kids, a few adults and a rock band playing this song and our kids singing it at the top of their lungs. You could feel them singing so hard that it was like they were the ones kicking down those walls when they sang, "there's no wall you won't kick down, lie you won't tear down, coming after me..." And it got stronger and stronger as the song went on and it's as if you could feel their hearts wrench as they cried out to God. It was amazing!

Rev. James Vaughan also wrote in the 1800's about the first verse of today's Psalm and he said, "There are many kinds and degrees of prayer in the world; from the coldest form to the most intense agony. Every one prays; but very few "cry." But



of those who do "cry to God", the majority would say,—"*I owe it to the depths. I learnt it there. I often prayed before; but never—till I was carried down very deep—did I cry.*" "Out of the depths have I *cried* unto thee, O Lord." It is well worthwhile to go down into any "depth" to be taught to "cry." It is not too much to say that we do not know what prayer may be till we have "*cried.*" And we seldom rise till we have gone very deep. "I die! I perish! I am lost! Help, Lord! Help me! Save me now! Do it now, Lord, or I am lost. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God!"

⁷O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with Him is great power to redeem.
⁸It is He who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

Finally, as I was preparing the bulletin for this Sunday's worship service, I looked to The Book of Confessions that governs the Presbyterian Church to find a paragraph that fit with the theological theme of today's service. But before I came to the one we are about to read together in our bulletin, I came across another one that I loved from The Westminster Confession of Faith. However, its Old English was so clunky and difficult I really could not see us reading it aloud together without us all jumbling the words and making a mess out of it. But then I came across it again rewritten in modern English and I thought I'd share that version with you because it fits this Psalm and this story so well. It says,

"The assurance true believers have of their salvation may be shaken, lessened, or interrupted for various reasons: from neglecting to preserve it; from committing some particular sin, which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit; from some sudden or strong temptation; or from God's withdrawing the sense of his presence and allowing them to walk in darkness. Nevertheless, they are never completely without God's seed, the life of faith, the love of Christ and of other believers, and the sincere heart and obedient conscience, out of which the Spirit may revive this assurance in



due time / and by which they are in the meantime kept from complete despair.”

In short, God loves you more than you can ever know, more than you could ever imagine. He loves you no matter what you’ve done or what you’ve left undone. He loves you and He forgives you when you sincerely want and ask for His forgiveness. Therefore, put all your hope in the Lord, for that’s where your help comes from.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.