The Steadfast Love of God

Lamentations 3:22-23

*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness*.

We don’t use the word steadfast much anymore. It means immovable, firmly fixed in place, not subject to change. It can mean constant, determinedly loyal, and firm in belief, determination, or adherence.

So the author of Lamentations is telling us that God’s love for us is constant and unchanging. I like to say that there is nothing that we can do to make God love us any more, nor is there anything we can do to make God love us any less. We are loved by God to the max – all the time, no matter what.

Any confusion to this axiom is cause by our ignorance and misunderstanding of what we read and are told. I don’t want to start a war, or alienate anyone, and I am not here to say that what I believe is the gospel truth because we won’t know until we see firsthand ourselves, but one instance where I think we have clouded beliefs involves our concept of hell. I have never been able to reconcile an incredible, unfathomably loving God with sending off children who have erred in judgment to a place of misery and suffering.

I’ve spoken about hell in the past and how it refers to a place where they burned their garbage – it was a place of purification. So the idea was that after death people who misbehaved were sent somewhere to be purified. But I always thought that place of purification would be in heaven.

The Christ said that “My Father’s house has many rooms.” To me this means that one or more of those rooms could be for purification, reeducation, and getting our heads screwed on right. No one will know till we get there, but my heart tells me that a loving God will assign rooms to be filled by kindred souls. People who are expressing the love of the Christ and have mastered the art of loving their neighbor will be together, while the ones who need remedial work on loving each other are separated until they get it.

But to throw the ones who have broken a commandment off into an eternal burning sea of other weeping teeth-gnashers just seems inhumane, let alone ungodly. There is something there that eludes our understanding.

Now the concept of hell is a remarkably good vehicle for behavior modification, which I believe was its intention. So over the years we have allowed this idea of going to hell when we do something bad to inculcate its message onto our minds and consciousness. So for some, our behavior is modified because of fear; for others our behavior is modified because it’s the right thing to do and because we believe that is the Will of God.

As I say, we won’t know until we get there and we find ourselves blissfully joyous or blisterfully miserable.

There are other instances in the Bible that would have us believe that God sends catastrophes onto His children as punishment. To my mind it is simple: Either God is loving and merciful or not.

From what the Bible says, what Paul has said, what Christ has said, I believe God is loving. Not only loving but is steadfastly loving because God is Love. I believe God is loving before all other character traits of God. God is ‘just’, shout some people. Yes, but God is Lovingly Just. God is powerful; yet God is lovingly powerful.

Psalm 118: 1-5 tells us: *Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” Let the house of Aaron say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” Let those who fear the Lord say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free….*

There is no question in my mind that God loves us, and does whatever is necessary to get us to understand that. Sometimes people come into our lives who serve as a messenger for God’s love. Sometimes people say just the right thing at the right time; sometimes we read just what we need. We see just the right sunset; hear the right song.

I can hear a song and Spirit can speak to my heart through the lyrics and the melody. It can be a sacred song or a popular song where the composer and lyricist were divinely inspired, and may not have even been aware. God uses such things as a ‘wave’ to us; trying to get our attention.

Jesus said that God is not revealed to the “wise and under-standing”. To attempt to know God through the intellect or by studying about God is really to miss God all together. Do we really need to define God in order to experience the presence and power and love of God? Scientists still cannot explain how life began on earth; how the crystalline structures leapt to a one cell living organism...but here we are!

I can’t define or explain electricity, but I see its effects and experience its benefits every day of my life. The same is true with God: we can know the transforming power of God’s Love, not by what it is, but by what it does.

It is beyond our capacity to know all of the infinite aspects of God, but we can know some of them. We can experience the peace, love, and joy that we know to be God. We can know God through our families, friends, nature, and all of Creation that is part of our lives.

When we flip a switch, the light comes on in our house. When we turn to God, His light is revealed in our lives. We don’t need to know how it works; all we need to know is how to use it. We just need to be open and innocent about sensing the presence of God in order to use and enjoy all the various aspects of God.

And this brings us to some very legitimate questions: So Patrick, if there is all this love flying around the world, in us, around us, why is there so much discord and hatred?

Great question, and all I can say is this: we use the power of electricity to run a city, save lives in a hospital, keep warm, keep cool, cook, and entertain ourselves, and that same electricity can be used to destroy people in an electric chair and Taser people.

While God’s Love runs through us, around us, and is accessible to us, we are given the freedom to use it any way we like or not at all. We are given the free choice to accept it and embrace it or turn our hearts and shield our eyes.

Yet all the while we are running from God, we are being loved. We are being contacted by Spirit in subtle and sometimes overt ways. We cannot escape this Love, and we are just ignorant or in a selfish painful mess if we think that we do want to escape that Love.

Psalm 117:1-2 states it jubilantly: *Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever*.

All the warm fuzzies we feel are God’s attempt to tickle our hearts with Love. So my prayer is that we recognize and accept God’s steadfast love. Although we may feel out of sorts or off balance at times on our life’s journey, God is there to catch us and carry us when we need it. We are loved beyond our comprehension, and all the Christ asks of us is to embrace it and share it.

Let us pray….