

WGUMC March 8, 2015 "Revel-ations"
Psalm 19; Exodus 20:1-17; I Corinthians 1:18-25

I've never been one for romances, but let me tell you a love story. It begins way back at the beginning when there is nothing but God, that is to say, nothing but Love, for God is Love. But Love can't be Love without something or someone to love, so God in one big bang creates the heavens and the earth to love. There is spectacular heat and light and not much else at first, but eventually stars and planets and galaxies appear. And on at least one of those planets: life!

So here we are, nearly 14 billion years later, looking at the world being created by Love and wondering why we can't see it. Instead, this is what we see: Imagine a crowd standing in a redwood forest. One person in the crowd looks up and sees a temple but the rest of us look around and see a good place for a sawmill.

John Muir was the guy who saw a temple. Muir's father had made him memorize the New Testament and a good

portion of the Old Testament as a child. But spending his first summer in the Sierras, he wrote about how God was revealed to him through the Book of Nature. Unfortunately for the redwood trees, most of the early settlers didn't read that book.

It's not as if they weren't able to; "for what can be known about God is plain to them [Paul said to the Romans] because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world [God's] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things [God] has made. So they are without excuse..." [Romans 1:19-20]

Even though they knew God, Paul would say that they didn't honor God or give thanks to God but "became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened." [Rom 1:21] Because they couldn't see the forest—not for the trees but for the "me's"—because love of self had blinded them to the love of God, ninety-five percent of the original redwood forest has been cut down.

In this senseless darkness, we're left to worship ourselves. Worse than *calling* God names, we *take* God's name. Talk about vain! And when everyone is running around being their own little god, anything goes, and love is gone. Lying, cheating, stealing, killing, become routine.

So God intervenes. In the next chapter of our love story, God gives us some rules to keep us from destroying ourselves. God gives us some laws to teach us how to love. That's why Moses went up that mountain. That's why we have the Ten Commandments. God made us in God's image; therefore, we need to know how to love.

Showing us love in the Book of Nature wasn't enough, so God gave us Love in a Book of Law. Perhaps that is why Psalm 19 starts out as a hymn to the creation but ends as a hymn to the Law. If we would just listen to the heavens telling us of the glory of God, if we would pay attention to the firmament proclaiming God's handiwork, and if we could hear the voice

that has no words but goes out to the end of the world, we wouldn't need a Book of Law. [Psalm 19:1-4]

But since we can't hear and we do need, we have the Law of the Lord, which is perfect, reviving the soul. We have the precepts of the Lord, which are right, rejoicing the heart. We have the commandment of the Lord, which is clear, enlightening the eyes. [Psalm 19:7-8] And the whole law is summed up in this: love your neighbor as yourself. [Leviticus 9:18; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14]

Now, if these Ten Commandments, these ten laws of love, were like the laws of physics, if they guided our moral being the way the law of gravity grounds our physical being, then we would know and live God's love. But there is another law at work here. Just as we designed airplanes and rocket ships, thinking that we could defy the laws of gravity, we are always inventing new ways to defy the laws of love so that we can forget our neighbors and live for ourselves.

I heard a commentary on NPR a while ago. It was about Google Maps and how it has changed the way we look at the world. We used to use paper maps and we could see where we were in relationship to the whole. And we could see that it was a big world and there was lots of it we had never seen. But now we look at a map on our cellphone or in our car and we are always in the center of everything. The world always revolves around our little blue dot. And we have no sense of what lies beyond our little screen.

It's no wonder that we live for ourselves. Technology makes it easy for us to think we have access to the whole world when in many ways our world has shrunk to the size of our screen. To an extent that we don't want to admit, our brains are being rewired. My dad belongs to a study group at his church in Colorado. He got all of his kids one of their books for Christmas. The book is called: *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*. Thanks, Dad.

In the 21st century, we aren't so far removed from St. Paul in the 1st century, who was also worried about the way his brain was wired. He said, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in [me] another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin...Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me....? [Rom 7:15,22-24]

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!" I know, we don't like that language. Most of us were raised on the gospel of self-affirmation. But even though I don't want anyone else calling me a wretch, I reserve the right to call myself one. You see, discovering that I'm a wretch means that I have a better chance of hearing the sweet sound of grace. For if I don't ever realize that I need it, I'll probably never receive it.

So being a wretch is not a curse; it's the precursor to a blessing. Just because we didn't see God's love in the Book of Nature and didn't follow it in the Book of Law, doesn't mean that Love has left us. No, God comes again to reveal Love in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thanks to the senselessness of our sin, we have ourselves a Savior. Just take a moment to revel-ate in that!

As for me, I have always loved being out in nature. Growing up, I spent hours and hours riding horses in Big Sky Country. But all the beauty I could see didn't convince me that God loved me. I went off to college, majored in religion, got a seminary degree. But all that Bible study didn't convince me that God loved me. The Book of Nature and the Book of Law weren't enough for me. As I've told you, it wasn't until I was feeling really wretched after brain surgery that grace finally got through to me. One day, reading and praying, I sensed Christ standing there next to me.

Sometimes it takes a surgery, real or symbolic, for God to get through to us the very basic truth that God really does love us. We may need Someone with a spiritual scalpel to cut open our hearts and minds and cut away the tumors and scars, so that we get that God is not going to give up on us.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul complains that the Jews wanted power. They wanted to see signs or miracles in the Book of Nature. The Greeks wanted wisdom. They wanted a God they could keep in a Book of Words and Laws. But all that Paul had to offer them was Christ on a cross, "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." [I Cor 1:23]

To anyone who can't understand love, the cross looks like weakness and foolishness. But in fact, on the cross, Christ becomes the power and wisdom of God. [1:24] On the cross, Love proves itself to be Love by doing the unthinkable, by loving the unlovable. As Paul says, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [Rom 5:8]

So for me, the cross is no historical artifact. Instead, it's a spiritual fact. The cross reveals a spiritual truth that love is not Love unless it gives itself away. Jesus was the God-man who gave his life for love and, in doing so, proved that he was both Life and Love. "And we have seen his glory...full of grace and truth." [John 1:14]

But is this where our love story ends: two thousand years ago, Love came and died on a cross? I don't think so. I happen to believe that Love is still revealing itself to us. Like everything else, Love is evolving; God is evolving. And who knows? Maybe in some galaxy far away, God is revealing Godself in unimaginable ways. But for here, for now, two thousand years after the cross, God's love is being revealed through those of us who, like Jesus, give ourselves away.

Not many of us are wise by human standards, as Paul says. Not many of us are powerful or of noble birth. [I Cor 1:26] But we can still reveal God's Love by taking up our cross every day

and giving ourselves away. And this is what losing your life for Christ's sake looks like: Some of you have been visiting Joyce, no matter how disconcerting those visits may be. Some of you are writing letters for Russ, no matter how unlovable the jury has judged him to be. Some of you are going to get up tomorrow morning and bring food to people who are living under tarps and sleeping on cardboard boxes. And this week some of you will give yourself away in other ways.

Whatever you do, keep doing it, because YOU are the next chapter in God's love story. There's no one else. YOU are the next step in the evolutionary process that is bringing Love to completion. Remember what the Good Book says: "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us and [God's] love is perfected in us." [1 John 4:12] And when that happens, we will all live happily ever after. The End.