

## ROOTED IN ABUNDANCE/GROWING IN LOVE

A Sermon by Rev. Dawn Allen-Herron,

With the People of St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Anchorage, Alaska

September 10, 2023

Scriptures: Exodus 12:1-14; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

It was NOT our plan...for me to be with you in this way today. And yet, here we are. So—greetings from Dallas, Texas, where temperatures have been over 105 degrees most of the past week. You can imagine how eager I am to be home, and to be with you. (If all goes according to the NEW plan, I will be in the office tomorrow morning.

Enough about me.

This morning, I'm eager to introduce a theme that you will hear a lot about this year at St. Mary's. Many of you have already seen it – on your bulletin cover.



We hope that this will be more than a “brand,” and will, instead, become an image that shapes us into a particular kind of community by framing a way of understanding ourselves, our world, and our God.

An awareness the abundance of God's goodness and love toward us –  
and the ways that it grounds our lives....

along with our longing for growing in a love that binds us in meaningful community.

These are not new ideas, but we hope that they can become a part of our conscious intention  
and understanding of who we are  
and what we do.

I see evidence of being rooted in abundance and growing in love in the Scripture we have read this morning.

Jesus' teaching in the Gospel is a helpful corrective for me.

Sometimes, I imagine how *lovely* it would be to have been among those  
who walked alongside Jesus, who saw LOVE lived so concretely.

To be a member of a community of people who knew Jesus –  
surely, it would make it so much easier to live in a loving community!

And yet, we see today's Gospel, that the earliest Jesus followers,  
an emerging community that could not yet be called “church,” even,  
is a community that needs instructions about *how* to love; *how* to live together.

Because guess what?? Some of them treated each other badly. (Go figure.)

*If someone wrongs you,*

*→go directly to them.*

*If that doesn't work,*

*→take 1-2 others with you.*

*If that doesn't work,*

*→involve the whole "church."*

Clearly—already in the earliest days of Jesus communities,

There has been gossiping, triangulation, and polarization.

What is clear here, is that LOVE IS DIFFICULT.

Even for those with Jesus standing there, in their midst,

It's sticky, and complicated, and some days, it feels unsustainable.

In the second reading this morning, Paul writes

*Love is the Law; Love fulfills the law.*

It's a simple teaching, but it's simplicity does not make it EASY.

The number of times that the teaching is repeated throughout the Scriptures gives us a clue that people were struggling to live out the teaching.

Living love is difficult.

For them, as for us,

it's not that we do not love,

nor that we do LONG to love more fully,

but, rather, that there are always growing edges in our loving.

We need to grow in love.

For many of us, this is a fundamental reason that we need a community of faith.

We need each other –

To eat together,

Sharing donuts and pancakes and soup and potlucks—

And we need each other to roll up our sleeves to do the GRITTY WORK

Of truth-telling and forgiving

and of figuring out what love looks like in complicated realities.

We need – or I need, at least – to turn, again and again,

Toward *attention* and *intention*

Of knowing and being a loving presence.

One way that we hope to foster this growth begins this fall – this week! - in small groups exploring *A Way of Love*.



*A Way of Love*  
*Practices for Growing in Love*

These small groups will consider together ancient traditions of practices for growing and sustaining love.....

....and how these practices, made fresh and flexible in our lives, may form us into a community that is growing in love rather than a group of individuals who are trying our best, And longing for more.

This liberating, life-giving love that we share is not something that we are capable of conjuring up within ourselves, is it?

The ongoing Story of our faith is that LOVE originates that it comes to us

from the very heart of God...

....and that its breadth and depth are beyond our imagination.

Sometimes we forget that.

Sometimes we imagine that we can become trees, bearing fruits of love, without any roots to nourish and anchor us.

If we can just do one more act of kindness, work toward ending one more injustice,

we can grow love.... And in all of our doing, we can become untethered from the Source of all of the Goodness that we know.

Evidently, the Israelites were like that, too.

God calls the people,

still in slavery, with only the promise of deliverance

to remember and celebrate their deliverance.

Even before they experience the Passover,  
the ritual that anchors them even until today  
is prescribed.

It will be in the FIRST month,  
marking the BEGINNING of everything else.

Celebration of Passover creates an annual, historical touchstone  
that reminds every generation  
that they are a LIBERATED people  
who can never disregard the plight of others.

Celebrating Passover becomes a moment, year after year,  
that calls each generation to renew their commitment  
toward liberating justice for all.

At Passover Seder celebrations,  
At least since the 9<sup>th</sup> century,  
A song is sung, with the refrain, in Hebrew, *Dayenu*.  
which means "It would have been enough."

In each stanza, God's grace is recalled,  
recognizing that even that one thing would have been enough.

*If God had just brought us out of Egypt ....*

*If God had just provided manna in the wilderness....*

We can imagine such a song ourselves, can't we?

If God had only released us from guilt and shame  
If God had only brought us into loving community  
If God had only given us meaningful work



*Dayenu* recalls the ABUNDANCE

of God's love

of God's grace

of God's unfailing commitment to justice for the vulnerable.

This fall, we will consider together

How our lives are rooted in this abundance—

how we are anchored

and connected

and nourished

by an abundance

that creates GENEROSITY in us,

a generosity that provides resources for mission and ministry that carry Good News

of Lived Love into our world.

We hope that these images and practices will become an invitation, for each of us.

In whatever ways you hear God's call,

join us in knowing ourselves to be a people who are rooted in abundance,

and growing in the love that we long for.

