

Greetings Redeemer family,

Back when I was in college, I took a songwriting course. Each week, we had to produce a new song and present it to the class. We'd talk about what worked well and didn't work for the different compositions. We studied the elements of popular songs, both recent and classic. One insight the professor pointed out truly surprised me: every good song is a love song. It may be a love lost, a love longed for, love gone wrong, or love finally realized. It may be romantic love, familial love, friendship or divine.

This emphasis on love is no passing fad of pop culture. It's all over the Bible as well. When asked for the greatest commandment, Jesus answered "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul, and all of your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." Paul similarly said that only three things will remain at the end of the age: faith, hope, love – and the greatest of these is love. Paul also lists love as the first of the fruit of the Spirit, which we are studying this Summer.

Our call to worship this week comes from Psalm 100.

*Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

Previously when I'd read this Psalm, I'd seen a rather simple and somewhat generic call to worship God. As I read it this week, however, I was struck by the last verse – which gives the reason for why we are to worship God: "because He is good, and his love endures forever." Worship is not simply a duty of grudging submission, like paying your taxes or flossing. Rather, it is a joyful response to a God who made us, loves us, and has called us His own.

*Father, long before creation
Thou hadst chosen us in love,
And that love so deep, so moving,
Draws us close to Christ above.
Still it keeps us, still it keeps us
Firmly fixed in Christ alone.*

*Loving Father now before Thee
We will ever praise Thy love,
And our songs will sound unceasing
'Til we reach our home above,
Giving glory, giving glory
To our God and to the Lamb.*

In those songs that I studied in songwriting class, love was often some airy, undefined feeling. Like cotton candy, it was sticky and sweet, but had no substance. Scripture presents love very differently. John puts it this way in his first epistle: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.” “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” During communion this week, we will sing a number of songs about the work of Christ as the ultimate example of love for us.

*When Love came down to earth, and made His home with men
The hopeless found a hope, the sinner found a friend
Not to the powerful, but to the poor He came
And humble hungry hearts were satisfied again*

*What joy, what peace has come to us!
What hope, what help, what love!*

*When ev'ry unclean thought and every sinful deed
Was scourged upon His back and hammered through His feet
The innocent is cursed, the guilty are released
The punishment of God on God has bought me peace*

We close our service this week with a hymn of celebration and fascination, that God would lavish His saving love upon unworthy sinners like you and me. It is my prayer that this song divine bewilderment would carry us through the next week – that each day we would stand in awe of the amazing love of God, and live our lives as a response of grateful worship.

*And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

Amazed by God's gracious love,
Tim Sharpe
Director of Worship
Redeemer PCA, Lynchburg VA