

Children’s Moment

Hello, girls and boys. Esperanza and I pray for you and your family. We love you and we appreciate you.

If you’ve ever seen grapes or tomatoes growing, you know that they develop on a vine that sends out branches, and the grapes or tomatoes hang from the branches. Sometimes the vine can grow very long, even up to fifty feet long. That would be a lot of grapes or tomatoes from just one vine!

I wonder if the plants we are watching will produce that kind of vine. The good news is, no matter how long or short the vine is, it will produce great fruit!

Jesus tells us we are like the branches on the vine. He says, *“I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain joined to me, and I to you, you will bear a lot of fruit. You can’t do anything without me”* (John 15:5).

This means that when we make Jesus a part of our lives, we grow like branches on a beautiful vine and bear sweet fruit. We do this by accepting God’s love, studying the Bible to learn more about following Jesus, and by praying for guidance.

We learn to love, be gentle, be cheerful, be patient, and to help those who need our help. That’s what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit.

We can continue to grow in love and friendship when we stay connected to Jesus like a branch is connected to the vine. We can produce a lot of fruit - do a lot of good things - by growing with Jesus, the Vine.

Please pray with me ...

Jesus keep me connected to you, so I can produce your fruit - to love, to be gentle and kind, to be cheerful, to be patient, and to help those who need help. In your loving name, I pray. Amen

You are invited to be part of Sunday School online. Visit us at www.coronaumc.com/childrensministry to sign up.

Message: “God is Love”

“Everyone for themselves. That seems to be the motto these days.”¹

That’s what Roberta thought. “Even a quick stop at a drive-thru reminded her of it. Just as she started to pull into the parking lot, a white car cut right in front of her!

“Is it really that important to be first?” Roberta muttered. The man behind the wheel couldn’t hear her, which was probably for the best. If he had, he may have said angry words to her right there in the parking lot. Just like the grouchy lady at the store the other day. Roberta hadn’t even said anything, when she wheeled around and accused Roberta of invading her space. Even when she apologized, the lady wasn’t satisfied. She had to have the last, nasty word. People these days!

Roberta sighed, keeping a safe distance from the other car.

Her faith in humanity was flagging. And it wasn’t just a disappointment in strangers. She got steamed all over again, thinking about the mechanic she’d used for years. He’d turned out to be untrustworthy, charging her unnecessarily and off the books for his own gain.

‘This is just the way the world is now,’ Roberta told herself.

“Everybody’s out for number one.”

The door at the back of the restaurant opened and a young woman appeared. It was Jessie, who often worked behind the counter. She’d waited on her many times; always with a smile. ‘At least that’s the way she was in the past,’ Roberta thought, her skepticism taking hold.

Jessie propped the door open with one hip, dragging out an oversize watering can and then another. She struggled to carry both at once, water splashing over her feet. They must have been filled to the brim.

Roberta assumed Jessie was headed down the pebbled path of boxwoods lined with sun-parched tubs of hot-pink petunias.

‘That’s not her job,’ she thought. The only person Roberta had ever seen working on the flowers was a dark-haired gardener from the landscaping company. ‘Maybe Jessie has to do it now’, she thought. ‘Probably cutting costs. The bottom line. That’s all that matters. Not people.’

¹ <https://www.guideposts.org/inspiration/angels/her-faith-was-restored-while-waiting-at-the-drive-thru>

Roberta pulled up to the intercom and rolled down her window to order her drink. A blast of hot air blew into the car. At the same time, Jessie was returning to the parking lot with two more heavy watering cans. The dark-haired gardener from the landscaping company pulled up and hurried over to her.

‘I thought it would be easier if I carried these out for you!’ Jessie said once she’d caught her breath.

The gardener’s face lit up at this unexpected kindness. Jessie went back to her job inside. By the time Roberta paid for her drink, the gardener was halfway through watering the petunias.

‘What happened back there did my heart good!’ Roberta called to Jessie. ‘Mine too,’ she said. ‘And my back as well. What a day!’

Roberta’s first sip was refreshing. But not half as refreshing as the reminder to never let negativity color her expectations of people.”² God’s good neighbors are everywhere, if we keep our eyes open to them.

That simple story puts a positive, lifegiving spin on what otherwise could be a negative day. Small, simple acts of kindness can touch us in when we most need it. They restore our faith, give us hope and remind us of the power of love. Best of all, we can pay kindness forward.

I think Roberta’s story is a perfect introduction to our passage from today, 1 John 4:7-21. John is teaching us about the nature of God’s love, the model for the love we are to show to each other and our neighbors. This morning, I’m going to focus on two key points.

John says, “*Dear friends, let’s love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. The person who doesn’t love does not know God, because God is love*” (1 John 4:7-8).

What a powerful statement! God is love. I don’t think we get how radical the revelation is to the people of John’s time. The letter is written during a time of persecution. The Romans had destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and killed most of the rabbis and leaders. The Jewish people

² *Ibid*

have been disbursed across the world, which is known as the diaspora. Decades of persecution and the threat of death for publicly sharing their faith has many Christians fearful. They’re on edge, waiting for the knock on the door at night.

You see, the Jewish image of God was a God of punishment and vengeance. You can read the Old Testament, the Jewish scripture, to see those images. They’d lost sight of the love of God. Jesus restores and renews their faith, giving them a more powerful image. Jesus reveals the loving nature of God in a real, meaningful way.

That’s why the movement, the way of Jesus, continued to expand and grow rapidly, even after his death. After Jesus rose, there were eleven disciples. After Peter preached on Pentecost, 3,000 people became believers. Scholars believe there were 100,000 believers thirty years after the resurrection. That’s amazing since Jesus’ story was shared, person to person, in households around the world. And it wasn’t just Jewish people who believed. Greeks, Romans and people from many other countries believed. For example, Thomas traveled to the southern part of India, first bringing faith to that area of the world.

But it wasn’t about a book. There was no Bible. It was about a person, Jesus. Specifically, it was about what Jesus did and why.

Jesus rose from the dead to save you because he loves you.

God is love. God loves us first, before we are even old enough to comprehend the concept of love. By grace we experience it, even before we are born. We don’t have to do anything but accept it.

What does it mean when we say God is love? When something is in our nature, it’s relatively unchangeable. I have bluegreen eyes, so no amount of wishing is going to change my eyes to grey or violet. I have a certain intellect. I can diligently study to improve, but I will never be a genius. Alcoholics have a vulnerability to alcohol that goes beyond what others experience. Tone-deaf people find it difficult to become great musicians. Each of us has a certain nature.

When John says God is love, he’s saying love is part of God’s nature. We can depend on God to love us, no matter what. God can’t help it.

We are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). I believe that means love is part of human nature as well. We need to give and receive love to be content and fulfilled.

The problem is, as John puts it, "our hearts condemn us" (vv20-21). Our heads and hearts are so filled with negative thoughts and emotions that love gets drowned out. We can embrace criticism, rather than our identity as God's children, who are loved.

John's clear about our fear. He says, "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment*" (1 John 4:18).

Have you ever visited a home where everyone cowers, out of fear of someone in the home? Domestic violence affects partners, children, even pets. Everyone tiptoes around, afraid they'll attract unwanted attention and the abuse that follows. Some people see God and church that same way. They've been hurt. Or their image of God is rigid, unyielding and vengeful, rather than loving, kind and patient.

I believe the key word is "perfect," which means "complete."

When our love is whole and complete, we are free. Fear has no hold on us. We can be ourselves, confident in God's love, no matter what we may face in life. That's the love that helped Job when he lost his family, business and job. His faith was sustained because he knew God loved him, even when his friends and spouse turned away.

You can live the same way with the same hope. Don't talk yourself out of accepting God's love. Don't let others steal your joy and love for life. Choose to put love at the center of your life.

How do you do that? It's easy to say, but difficult to do. I wrestle with it as you do. Here's what I can tell you. It starts with trust. Trust God. It's only when you believe God wants the best for you that you can let your guard down and accept God's love. You have to choose to do so, each moment of each day. And, slowly but surely, life gets better. Your faith in God and good neighbors will be restored.

The good news: God never gives up, never loses hope and always loves you. Turn to God and receive love. Start today.

1 John 4:7-21 (CEB)

Dear friends, let’s love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. The person who doesn’t love does not know God, because God is love. This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him. This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins.

Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us. This is how we know we remain in him and he remains in us, because he has given us a measure of his Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the savior of the world. If any of us confess that Jesus is God’s Son, God remains in us and we remain in God. We have known and have believed the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them. This is how love has been perfected in us, so that we can have confidence on the Judgment Day, because we are exactly the same as God is in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. The person who is afraid has not been made perfect in love. We love because God first loved us. Those who say, “I love God” and hate their brothers or sisters are liars. After all, those who don’t love their brothers or sisters whom they have seen can hardly love God whom they have not seen! This commandment we have from him: Those who claim to love God ought to love their brother and sister also.