

In the name of Jesus, whose heavenly Father loves us as His children, and feeds us and clothes us and adds blessings upon blessings. Amen.

Forever—from eternity—God the Father has loved His Son.

- From eternity, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit have loved one another.
- They have existed in a perfect community of love.

And at the creation of the world, that love spread out, we might say; it came forth.....as God created a world in love and created a world to love.

- In these 11:00 Lenten sermons this year we are tracing the dimensions of God’s enormous love for us.
- Recall our theme for this Lenten season is “O Love How Deep, How Broad, How High.”

If you have come for or need affirmation that someone loves you—you have come to the right place.

- There is nothing in your life, nothing in your world, nothing in the universe that can match God’s love for you.
- The love of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Last week we looked at “High Love, Down In the Dust.”

- We saw how God created us and He will recreate us.
- Now that we have looked at creation, the natural progression we consider this week is how God’s great love to us is displayed in His fatherly provision and protection.

Just how big is God’s love?

- Well, what are some big things that we could compare God’s love to?

Go ahead, think of something big.

- How about the proverbial “elephant in the room?” Too small.
- How about a blue whale 100 feet long? Still way too small.

God’s love is bigger.

- A cruise ship? A mountain?
- The whole globe of the earth? The whole universe?
- According to current scientific estimates, the universe is 93 million light years in diameter.

- That means that if a really bright light were turned on at one end of the universe, it would take that light 93 million years to reach the other end.
- And light travels pretty fast.....it travels at the speed of light!

Yes, God's love for you is as big as the whole universe, because in Christ, He created it all for you.

- The whole world, the whole universe around you, brothers and sisters in Christ, is full of wonder and beauty and delight.....
- Because God has provided it to you as a gift of love.

There is a famous Christian cosmologist named Guy Con Sol Mag No (Consolmagno).

- He is the director of the Vatican Observatory.
- Guy Con Sol Mag No has been involved in all kinds of astronomical research.
- He says he loves learning about the creation because he has come to realize, and has new discoveries all the time of how the Creator is so full of love.

Every good thing of creation flows from the love of God.

- The roof over your head and the pillow under your head.
- The bacon and the eggs.
- The vitamins and minerals that nourish you.
- The medicines that heal you.

The delicate bird flitting on a branch.

- The stream with the sunshine dancing on its waters.
- Majestic mountains.
- Crops growing in the fields.
- Dogwood trees flowering in the spring.
- Sunsets with all of their variety and indescribable colors and beauty.

Truly God is glorious and generous.

- Truly your God is the Father of love.

Our sermon text chosen for this week is from Matthew chapter 6, part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

- Of course, it was read to you just a few minutes ago.
- Jesus teaches His disciples, and us, not to worry about the provisions of life.

Allow me to give you some of the highlights from this text. Jesus said.....

- “Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.”
- “Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.”
- “And which of you can add a single hour to his span of life?”

Jesus further continued on.....

- “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”
- “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you?”
- “Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you.”

Your heavenly Father loves you, and He will care for you.

- That is the bottom line of this passage.
- In Jesus Christ, He gives you His righteousness and an eternal kingdom.
- He will surely also daily and richly provide you with all that you need to support this body and life.

What an odd pair of mental images Jesus creates, as He makes His point here.

- Have you ever seen a bird planting the crops?
- Of course not.
- Birds don’t do that.
- But they still have food to eat, because God feeds the birds.

And then there are the lilies.

- Jesus says the lilies neither toil or spin.
- Just as the birds do not plant crops, so the lilies don’t pick the seeds out of cotton or operate the spinning wheel to make yarn.
- But they are still “dressed” beautifully.
- A single blooming flower stands as beautiful as a movie star and as glorious as a king.
- Because God dresses them that way.

And Jesus’ point is this. His argument is this.

- If the birds are fed by God and the flowers are dressed by God, how much more will your heavenly Father care for you.
- You are more to Him than the graceful birds and the delicate flowers.

God loves you.

- Every good thing that you have is a gift from His hand.
- It flows to you from His “fatherly divine goodness and mercy.”
- As James chapter 1 verse 17 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.”

If God provides for the birds and flowers, how much more will He care for you?

- This is an argument from the lesser to the greater.

And if God has give you life itself, and eternal life in Christ—salvation and righteousness and an eternal kingdom.....

- If God has given you these things, He will surely also provide simple gifts such as food and clothing.
- This is an argument from the greater to the lesser.

See all the ways that Jesus works in His teaching and preaching to persuade us, to remind us, to convince us, that God loves us and will care for us.

- Even though we often take it for granted.
- God still provides for and cares for us.

Jesus uses another argument in Luke’s Gospel to assure us that we can seek all that we need from our heavenly Father, even the greatest things, such as the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus says to us in Luke chapter 11 verses 11 through 13.....
- What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Jesus is saying that the heavenly Father’s love for you is even greater than the love of an earthly father for his child.

- Think about that.

- Yes, every earthly father and earthly mother is imperfect; some of them deeply flawed, a few even abusive.
- But imperfect though they are, think about the strong, strong love of a parent for their child.
- The joy they find in helping.
- The pain they feel when their child suffers or struggles.

Picture a father out in the backyard, spending his weekend building a swing set or a treehouse.

- Picture a mother, sitting on the edge of her sick child's bed, lovingly rubbing his back.
- Parents—working long hours, providing, feeding, clothing, caring, protecting.
- They want to.
- Even though it sometimes runs them into the ground, they love their children.
- And Jesus tells us here that God the Father loves you even more than this.

But if we look closely at that Luke passage, there is another point of emphasis also here for us.

- Something very remarkable.
- He talks about what parents do for their children but then adds, “If you then, WHO ARE EVIL, know how to do these things.
- We who are sinful, evil.

And who are these children who receive His love and provision?

- We are. Even though we are sinful and evil. We deserve nothing good from Him.
- Yet, even in our sinfulness, Jesus assures us that God will not only provide earthly gifts; but also the greatest gifts, His Holy Spirit, faith, hope, forgiveness, salvation, His kingdom, eternal life.

He gives so many gifts, such great gifts.....to sinners.

- Oh what love the Father has shown us, and shows us every day.
- He causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall even for the wicked.
- Is it any wonder that St. John can write in his first epistle chapter 4 verse 16, these simple words, “God is love.”

O how great His love, even in terms of earthly provision and blessings.

- Can you even begin to count them all?
- He provides for our needs.
- He defends us from all kinds of danger. He guards and protects us from all kinds of evil.
- I bet there have been instances in your life, I know there has been instances in your life, when you knew it was only God's care and protection that saved your life.

- That His angels or His providence shielded you from great harm.

You probably wanted to tell someone that, at the time.

- Maybe you did tell someone that it must have been God who helped you.
- But He does this all the time, every day, snatching us and shielding us from dangers and calamities that could have fallen on us.
- Protecting us from the evil one, who is always seeking someone to harm and destroy.

Oh how the Father loves you.

- He not only provides for you and protects you, He maintains beauty for you, in this broken world.
- Every day, your heavenly Father brings something beautiful before your eyes, to nourish your soul and to encourage you.
- If only we have the eyes—and the strength—to see it.
- Though we are sinners and there is no merit or worthiness in us, God just keeps giving.
- And He wraps up so many of His blessings in beauty!

You know all this is true.....but at the same time you might look another direction and think, “He’s painting a pretty rosy picture.”

- What about all of the pain and tragedy in the world?
- Pandemics and illnesses.
- Scarcity and famine.
- Poverty.
- People who suffer unthinkable things at the hands of others.

Can God’s love for us really be so big, if we’re honest about all of this?

- Yes, His love for us really is enormous, deep, real, father-like.
- He is the potter, we are the clay.
- He is the Father, and we are just children. Beloved children, but children.

There are many things about the way that God governs this world that we cannot fully see or understand.

- Why does the God who loves us, and who cares for us so richly, also allow such hard things to come, such evil things to happen?
- While in many cases they are caused by our sinfulness; at the same time this is a great mystery that we cannot begin to fully explain.
- We leave the answers to that question in our Father’s loving hands.

But even in times of sadness and want, we live under God's loving promise, that one day, these sorrows and these evils will be no more.

- Jesus has conquered sin and death and evil.
- Jesus is making all things new.
- And one day soon, He will come again.
- He will dry every tear.
- And His everlasting kingdom will be a place of perfect provision, health, joy, kindness, love, safety, and beauty.

And even now in this life, He cares and provides for us even though we are evil. God the Father loves us for the sake of Jesus Christ, His Son.

- It was through His suffering and death on our behalf that Jesus won for us a place in the Father's heart forever.
- What goodness and blessings the Father provides us through the created things all around us.

Yet it was these things, the gifts of the Creator that were turned against our loving God, against our Lord Jesus.

- What kind of wood, from what kind of lofty green tree was fashioned into the cross of death?
- What kind of ore from the hills was smelted into metal, and hammered into spikes and spear, to pierce our God?
- What animal hide was tanned and cut into strips to form the whip that scourged our Lord and tore open His skin?
- What thorny plant was dried and twisted into the cruel crown that pressed onto His brow?
- When God first set the hills in place, and formed the ancient rocks, did He know that one of those mountains would be the place of death of His Son and one of those stones would close the tomb of His dead and mangled body?

Of course He did.

- He knew all this before He even created the world.
- Yet His love is so great He still created all things.

The greatest mystery is not why God allows tears and pain in our lives; but why He would love us so and give us good things.

- And yet He does.
- He loves us and cares for us for Jesus' sake.
- For Jesus bore our sins on the cross, so that we might share His sonship, His special place in the Father's heart.

- Because of Jesus, our heavenly Father deals with us in enormous love, and richly and daily supplies us, protects us, and surrounds us with beauty.

Dear fellow saints at Hope.....

- May God grant us eyes to recognize His loving gifts in our daily lives.
- And may God's fatherly love for us flow on, through us, to others—as we seek to provide for those in need, to protect those who are in danger, and to create beauty and beautiful things in love.
- And so, show ourselves to be His children.
- Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

We now continue with our prayers as read responsively on page 265 in your hymnal. Our prayer response as printed in your bulletin will be, "Lord have mercy." (MOVE TO ALTAR)