

Coram Deo  
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura  
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi  
Deo Volente  
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church  
By the Rev.Dr. John S. Niles

# You Are Loved!

## Ephesians 3:10-21

### Series 5

*Sermon Series: Who Do You Think You Are?  
Finding Your True Identity in Christ.*

***February 13, 2022***

An elderly woman was the life of the senior's home that she was in. She noticed one day a man new to the residence come into the common room. She immediately went over to him to say hello. After which she said, 'you look just like my fourth husband.' The man startled said, "How many husbands have you had?" "Three." the woman said. A few months later they were married. After which one of the ladies on the residence said, what did all your other husbands do for a living before they died. She said, "One was a Banker, another an entertainer, the third was a funeral director and finally a minister. Why would you marry so many different men?" To which she said, "One for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, four to go

We create the life we live. We get the life we choose by every action we take and every choice we make. Every action we take, and choice we make creates the life we have today. If we choose to sow seeds of bitterness, anger, resentment, jealousy, hatred; we will then reap the fruit of that bitter seed. If however, we wish a sweeter life, and we sow the seeds joy, peace, love and forgiveness; and that is exactly what we will reap. We get the life we choose and create.

St. Paul understood this. That is why he said, that he wanted us to be rooted and grounded in love. He wanted our lives to produce a life that abounded in love and abundance.

He said, "*For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father... that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.* (3:14-19)

## The Length

So let us then, consider first the **length** of God's love. How far does God's love extend? And how long will it last.

Robert Ingersoll, the well-known atheist of the last century, often would stop in the middle of his lectures against God and say, "I'll give God five minutes to strike me dead for the things I've said." He then used the fact that he was not struck dead as proof that God did not exist. Theodore Parker said of Ingersoll's claim, "And did the gentleman think he could exhaust the patience of the eternal God in five minutes?"

Since the very beginning God has been continually wronged and rejected by those He made in His own image. Yet, His love was patient and kind. His love remained.

Does the love of a parent stop for their child if that child has rejected them and rebelled against them? Sometimes all we can do is love them from a distance--like the father in the Scriptural story of the Prodigal son. That son who ran and rebelled, and the father waited, worried and wondered if he would return to himself and home. Yet, there are times, when we go to them

Ernest Hemingway, in his short story, "The Capital of the World," tells the story about a father and his teenage son who lived in Spain. Their relationship became strained, eventually shattered, and the son ran away from home. The father began a long journey in search of his lost and rebellious son, finally putting an ad in the Madrid newspaper as a last resort. His son's name was Paco, a very common name in Spain. The ad simply read:

"Dear Paco, meet me in front of the Madrid newspaper office tomorrow at noon. All is forgiven. I love you." Signed Your Father. As Hemingway writes, the next day at noon in front of the newspaper office there were 800 "Pacos" all seeking that love and forgiveness.

You see, God knows what we need--and He goes to whatever length He needs, to bring it to us. And what we need is Him.

## II

## The Breadth

We have seen the length and now the breadth of God's love. How wide is God's love? How broad is it? How much can it encompass? Again we hear scriptures proclaim, God so love the world...the world. He loves those who fight against Him. He loves those who love Him. He loves those who hate themselves, and therefore can't find Him. There is a wideness in God's love like the wideness of the ocean.

Knowing, therefore, as God does, our human failings, God must be a God of infinite forgiveness. The breadth of which is unending. To be able to forgive, time and time again, those who willfully do wrong--to be able to patiently wait until they come to themselves and return to Him seeking forgiveness--demands infinite love.

An old man lay dying in the public ward of a city hospital. His life had been a struggle against grinding poverty and crippling ill-health. There seemed nothing for him to live for, and death would have been a happy release. A hospital chaplain, for the old school, wanting to know if the patient belonged to any church, stopped by his bed and

asked him, “What persuasion are you, my friend? “Paul’s persuasion,” came the quiet reply. The puzzled minister said, “Well, I know about Catholics, protestants and Baptist and Presbyterians and the rest, but “Paul’s persuasion” had him mystified; so he asked, “What do you mean, my friend” With difficulty the old man half raised his head from the pillow and said in soft, yet vibrant tones, “I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor power, anything else, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

### III

## The Depth

We have considered the length and breadth of God’s love. So now, let us consider the depth of God’s love. There is a shallowness to our understanding of love today. Love is this feeling we feel, not a commitment we make and keep. We can say in one breath, that we love music, or oranges, fast cars; and in the next that we love our wife’s or husbands. And it would seem we love them all with the same love. And for many, this is true-- for there is no depth to it. When we say I love oranges; if an orange could talk it would say, “you don’t love me. You want to use me and squeeze all the sweetness out of me and throw me away afterwards. You love yourself, and just want to use me.”

No one can survive in life without love. Dr. John Plokker, head of a large mental hospital in Holland said,, “the deepest need in human nature is to love and be loved.” Dr. Albert Schweitzer has said, “We are all so much together, but we are all dying of loneliness.”

Its true origin is still very vague. According to the legend, the day is celebrated to mark the death anniversary of Saint Valentine who died in mid-February in 270 AD. It is said that Saint Valentine was a doctor, Christian and priest, who defied emperors' orders and secretly married couples to spare husbands from war. He was thrown into prison and there helped the Guard whose daughter had a serious eye infection that could cause blindness. After she was well, he deeply cared for her, and as the legend says, he wrote her a note saying “be my valentine”. His was not a shallow one but one of depth and sacrifice which reminds us of the love that bears all things, endures all things, and a love that never fails.

### IV

## The Height

*“For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father... that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. (3:14-19)*

We have considered the length, breadth, and depth of God’s love, and finally, let us consider the height of God’s love. His love is the highest and the best we know. And because it is the highest and the best we know, it pulls the best out of us and helps us become our best selves. Once we really come into contact with God’s love, after we have taken it out of the Bible and Hymnal; after we put it into our lives, and live our lives as if

God really did love us; then we will find that inevitably it begins to pull us upwards. We begin to dream and see ourselves in a new way and a new light. We find that life is lived on a higher plane than ever before. We begin to see what He sees in us, and begin to live accordingly.

Michelangelo, the most famous of the great Florentine artists of the Renaissance, attempted forty-four statues in his life, but he finished only fourteen of them. You are familiar with some of them--David in Florence Square, the Pieta, and Moses, to mention a few of the best known. But the thirty he did not finish are interesting too. You can see them in a museum in Italy...a huge chunk of marble from which he sculpted only an elbow or the beginning of a wrist. Another shows only a leg, the thigh, the knee, the calf, the foot--even the toes. The rest of the body is locked in. It will never come out. Another reveals a head and shoulders, but the arm and hands are still frozen inside.

Many people are just like that frozen in concrete -- locked in time. Though time marches on, however, some people never do. Of all the tragedies of life, the greatest is for a person to live and die and never break out --never to realize the possibilities hidden within.

There was an old Hebridian prayer that stated, "Take me over the tumult into Your presence and there teach me what I am and what Thou has purposed me to be." Teach me what I am and what Thou has purposed me to be.."

God sees us as He has purposed us to be not just as we are. He saw Simon the man of Sand and drew from within him Peter the man of rock. He saw Saul the persecutor of the church and drew forth Paul the proclaimer of the Gospel. And He seeks to do the same for each of us. He seeks to turn our stumbling blocks into stepping stones, our scars into stars and our crosses into plus signs and our crucifixions into resurrections. You think about that. Amen.