

“Love’s Powerful Presence”

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This portion of Scripture comes after the Last Supper. Jesus is praying to his Heavenly Father. It’s taken from the Book of John, chapter 17, verses 20 through 26. I’ll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

“Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ‘Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.’”

This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. Let us pray. Holy God, who is the perfect example of love that produces unity, touch our hearts. Grant us understanding that transcends our differences and disagreements in family relationships. Pour the unity of your love into each heart. Remove any barrier that may be present. Stretch us to reach for that high bar of your love. Amen.

In the passage of Scripture that was read Jesus prays for the unity of his followers—past, present, and future believers. We and our children’s children are the focus of his praying. The love that the Father and the Son have for each other is the kind of love we’re to mirror in our family relationships and in the body of Christ. This prayer for unity is intergenerational—it looks back, it’s for today, and it looks to the future.

The love that mothers have for their children, even though it’s human, points us to the love God has for his Son. It’s a self-giving love that volunteers the giving of one’s life, and it creates a oneness between a mother and her child. Because it began before the child was even conceived. Each baby is knit together in their mother’s womb fearfully and wonderfully by God.

It’s after the birth of a child that sometimes mothers begin to ask certain questions. “God, I believe in you and know you exist, but where are you in the changing of diapers?” It doesn’t smell holy or feel sacred

I remember an incident that happened about 27 years ago. It was after I’d given birth to my second child, Denise. I hadn’t seen her come out of her room for a few minutes. She was still in the crawling stage. I’d just changed one of those stinky ones. I noticed her door was partially closed—I hadn’t left it that way. I got curious, so I popped my head in, and there she was rubbing that stinky brown stuff all over her face.

Some of it was in her mouth, up her nose, it was rubbed in her hair, and don’t forget about the other orifice, the ear. She was laughing up a storm. That brown stuff was rubbed all over the wall she was sitting against. She thought it was hilarious, and she had a big brown smile to prove it! I was speechless. Then I asked the question, “God, where are you in the changing of diapers?”

At times during the raising of your kids you wonder if it's all going to be okay. You wonder if you're raising your kids good enough, but you're doing the best you can. You pray and trust God, but in your mind you're thinking. "God, I sure hope you make this turn out okay." My son was born with a preacher's mouth. This mouth would not stop—EVER. I questioned whether he'd ever get through school. Once a week, I'd drag myself to the teacher's office and check in one more time to see how my son Marcus was doing.

Every week she'd say the same, and she'd have the same look on her face; it was a look of exhaustion mixed with attempted patience. She said, "Well, Marcus is talking so much to everyone, about everything, all the time, everywhere; I wonder how he's learning anything! I gave him permission to go to the boy's room. It had been way too long for him to be gone. So I stuck my head out the classroom door cause I heard someone talking, and there he was, talking to someone talking, talking, talking." That was one of those moments I asked God, "God, where are you in the making of Marcus' mouth?"

I'm sure all parents have asked themselves similar questions. They think to themselves, "God, where are you in all of these routine and mundane daily struggles?" Now, looking back over the years, I realize that God meets us right where we are in all of those struggles. God is very present in each one of them.

God was in the changing of the stinky diapers—right there in that room. God was the one who made my son's motor mouth! God doesn't hide or disappear in the midst of our daily struggles. In fact, as we learn to acknowledge God in all of these tedious and humdrum things, we can see he's right there—speaking to us, encouraging us, and moving us closer in relationship to him.

Dwight Zscheile was ordained in The Episcopal Church in 2005. In his book titled *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*, he said

this. “God meets us where we are . . . God in Christ enters into human existence fully, in an ordinary family . . .” And so it is with us. God enters into our family life and meets us where we are. When we acknowledge God in our routine daily struggles, we see our lives differently and understand that we’re not alone. We can feel conflict, but the unity of family binds us together. We experience joy, and that feeling can’t be replaced by anything. When we acknowledge God in the midst of these moments, we see with a different pair of eyes.

In the midst of our struggles with our families and children we sometimes think God isn’t hearing our prayers. We wonder if he’ll act and answer our prayers. We worry and cry. We may feel rejected and hurt. We may even begin to think God isn’t in the daily struggles, but God is, God is right here—waiting for us to acknowledge him and to turn in his direction. Love’s powerful presence is all around you, at the same time present with you to encourage and reassure you.

God invites us to see our struggles with different eyes as we acknowledge love’s powerful presence that’s constantly with us. It’s a presence we’re invited into; it’s filled with love and forgiveness—mercy and compassion—trust and reliance—it believes the cup to be more than half full—in fact, the cup overflows! When God is in it, the cup is overflowing. This is the stuff that love is made of in a family of God, and it produces a unity that comes straight from the heart of God.

Where’s the presence of God in Baltimore when violence and hatred seem to ravage a city? It’s in the giving of a bottle of water from a little black boy to a police officer. It’s in a white man’s supremacism that finally listens to black families’ struggles of poverty and is moved to change his thinking to one of compassion and caring. It’s in the Baltimore-Washington Conference Leaders announcing a mission response to the riot and unrest that’s affecting the residents

of Baltimore. It's in the giving of Health and hygiene items that are being collected and passed out to those who need them.

God's powerful presence of love is with us every day. God hears our prayers, and God will answer them. So be of courage and take heart. God is with you. Let's pray. Holy Spirit, unite us in Jesus the Son and make us one. Thank you for hearing and answering our prayers. Thank you for your love that's made us one with you and one with each other. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.