

SERMON, 12 April 2026

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Title: Love without limits

I grew up in a church where the pastor preached the Word of God – he was a strong, spiritual preacher, but he sort of did it however he felt led.

But the wonderful thing about the lectionary is that it pulls together beautiful Scriptures and lines them up together in a way so that the ideas flow into each other - helping us learn more about God. Today they are in Psalm 16, and the Gospel of John, and the first letter of the apostle Peter.

The love of God the Father

I love Psalm 16, and what it tells us about the love of God the Father. From verse 5:

5 Lord, You alone are my portion and my cup;

You make my lot secure.

⁶The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;

surely I have a delightful inheritance.

⁷I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;

even at night my heart instructs me.

⁸I keep my eyes always on the Lord.

With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

⁹Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;

my body also will rest secure,

¹⁰because You will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,

nor will You let your faithful one see decay.

¹¹You have made known to me the path of life;

You will fill me with joy in Your presence,

with eternal pleasures at Your right hand.

God's love for His own is so evident in Psalm 16.

One of my favorite Christian authors, Jon Sweeney, wrote: "God's nature is to give and give and give, without measure, and God does this at all times—but especially when we are down and out, lost and lonely. God asks only that we take what comes in this gift, which is *nothing less than God's very self.*"

You can't ask God for a little comfort, a little help. He doesn't just pat you on the head or send you little bits of His love: He gives His whole very self to you: His love, His purity, His mercy, His holiness, His light that doesn't allow anything to be hidden.

He works for your holiness as well. This isn't necessarily easy or comfortable - we know that. But as the 19th century preacher, George MacDonald, said, you can't get to heaven with a little bit of Hell in your pocket. MacDonald says: *"Out Satan must go, every hair and feather!"*

King David was the author of Psalm 16. How he loved and trusted the Lord! You can see it in every line of this psalm. But the truth is, in David's life he ran the gamut with God. There were miraculous results when David followed God, like in I Samuel 17, when he faced Goliath – this 9-foot Philistine warrior – and killed him with a stone to the forehead from his sling. Five chapters later, David is hiding in a cave from King Saul, who wants to get rid of this challenger to his throne. And then he ascends to the throne of Israel - a former sheep herder! Then we see the results of having unlimited power and money; we read about the people he had killed to satisfy his own desires, like Uriah the Hittite, who was Bathsheba's legitimate husband; and then there were David's extremely rebellious sons, especially Absalom who tries to stage a coup against his father and is later killed in revenge.

There is a lot of serious sin in David's life story – and his repentance came at great cost, when God confronted him with it: public scandal, shame, and lifelong negative consequences for his family. But God never, ever stopped loving David – in fact, the human lineage of God's own Son, our Savior, goes through the house of David. David never forgot his God, either. The last psalm, Psalm 72, reads: "Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory."

The Lord Jesus Christ: God with skin on!

So, skip ahead 950 years or so, to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world. He was GOD and He was human at the same time! How could this be?? As the Nicene Creed puts it, the Lord Jesus is:

"the only begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father."

You've probably heard the story of the little girl who was afraid of going to bed in the dark. Her mother said, "It's all right, honey, God is with you." The little girl said, "I know, Mommy, but I need someone with skin on!"

Our Lord Jesus was – He IS – "God with skin on". God, who had the time and inclination to hold children on His lap and talk with them. God, who made His listeners laugh when He told the

Pharisees that they were straining gnats out of their teeth and swallowing a whole camel at the same time; God who had women friends and women disciples, and made them feel valued, and heard, and never took them for granted. God who submitted to violent abuse and death, even though he was so much more powerful than his killers – and he did it in order to save his little ones.

He loved human beings. His Father had given them into his hand, and He loved them. And all those people He loved during his life in Israel were concrete examples of how He feels about all of us - right now.

I love Luke 10, where Martha – Lazarus' sister – “opened her home” to Jesus and His disciples for the day. So, He and His friends are all there having a good time, and Martha is going to give them dinner, but she is feeling harassed and frustrated about having to do all the work by herself. (She has a sister, by the way, who is not helping. I had a sister like this, so I can identify.) She says, “Lord, I’m doing all this stuff to get dinner ready, and my sister Mary is just sitting there with You. Tell her to get over here and help me!” Jesus is so gentle: “Oh my dear Martha, you are worried about so many things. But really, there’s just one thing that matters, and Mary is choosing it right now by listening to Me. I’m not going to take that away from her.”

He put up with a lot of ignorance and competitiveness in His male disciples too. I wonder if maybe His words to Peter in John 20 were words He said often when the 12 were complaining about one thing or another: “What is that to you? You follow me.”

So John 20 says that when He had been raised from the dead and then appeared to His disciples for the first time. . . one of them wasn’t in the room. Thomas: Doubting Thomas, right? But he was no more obtuse than the rest of them. Let’s remember what went before. Peter and John had run to the tomb (evidently competing over who would get there first), they found it empty and they still didn’t draw the obvious conclusion. Jesus’ disciples locked themselves into their gathering room because they thought that they would be arrested next; they didn’t get what the Lord had done. Even Mary Magdalene, who loved Him so much, didn’t really get it until Jesus spoke to her Himself.

So after Jesus appeared in person, in the room, to these men of little faith . . . Thomas comes in, and he says he can’t believe it. I’m thinking, this probably wasn’t doubt as much as it was pain. “I just can’t afford to trust again. I hoped in Him, I gave him everything I had, and He just left. I needed to rely on Him, and He let me down.” So then, 8 days later . . . Jesus comes in again, through a locked door (why were the disciples always locking themselves in??). He goes straight to Thomas: “Thomas, hey. It’s really me. Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Jesus wasn’t mocking or rebuking Thomas; He was speaking in compassion for His poor disillusioned, loved one. And Thomas

says, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus looks at him – at all of them – and says, “So, now you guys believe in me because you’ve seen me. How blessed are all those people who haven’t see me in person, and yet will believe in Me!” That’s you and me. He was thinking of us – in love – right then.

Thomas ended up travelling all over, preaching about Jesus the Son of God. He went as far as India – he evangelized and established church congregations there for 20 years, before he died.

And that’s what the love of Jesus is about; He is God with skin on.

The Holy Spirit: The gift of God loving us from the inside

In John 14, Jesus tells his disciples, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, another Comforter [besides Me], who is going be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

And that is what happened. And the Holy Spirit was not just for those disciples, not just for the people that the Lord Jesus was talking to right then. In Acts 2, Peter is preaching and he says to the crowd: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. *And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*”

The Holy Spirit is a gift, and He is in us, loving us from the inside.

One really important thing the Holy Spirit does is to help us to see God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ for who they actually are. Understanding this puts everything else into proper perspective! And I mean, everything – even pain, even death.

Acts 6 and 7 talk about Stephen, who had been chosen to help with administrative tasks among the growing Jewish church. But Stephen was also “full of God’s grace and power”, and had been doing miracles in the name of the Lord Jesus – something that the Jewish authorities didn’t like at all. So in Acts chapters 6 and 7, Stephen has been telling the religious authorities who the Lord Jesus is. They didn’t like it, and aimed to kill him. “When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.” I don’t know exactly what that looked like, but I bet they were **really** angry.

But Stephen, who was “full of the Holy Spirit”, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look!” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man, Jesus - standing at the right hand of God.” Well, that did it. The crowd stoned him to death on the spot. While they killed him, he said, “Lord, do not hold this sin against

them!” The Holy Spirit showed Stephen the reality of God the Father and God the Son, and nothing else mattered.

I think the Holy Spirit loves and teaches us, too. Ephesians 4:30 tells us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Don’t cause him to sorrow over you. It’s not like, “Don’t you dare make him mad, or else He’ll blow you out of existence!” The only way we could hurt the all-powerful, almighty Holy Spirit so much is if He loved us very dearly.

This love and this relationship – what King David, Peter, Thomas and Stephen had – is ours.

In some ways I envy the people who knew the Lord Jesus personally while He was physically on the earth. On the other hand, even knowing Him personally, it took his friends and disciples a really long time to understand who He was and what God was going to do through Him.

But we have the Holy Spirit, and we know the story of the Lord Jesus’ life and death and resurrection, and we know how the Holy Spirit shaped the church – those people who loved and believed in the Lord Jesus. We see Him doing it today too.

1 Peter 1:8-9 is talking about us: “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Love without limits – is ours.

Prayer

Lord God, You know us completely and You love us without reserve: Thank you for Your word, that shows us so much about who You are. Help us to live in Your grace, and to love others as You have loved us.