

31 March 2024, Easter Day B  
St. John's Parish of Newtonville

Isaiah 25:6-9  
Acts 10:34-43  
John 20:1-18  
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

## Love Wins

**The Rev'd Michael Thompson, Esq.**

Let us pray.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts beating as one be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer, and set our hearts on fire with your love. **Amen.**

Since Palm Sunday, I've been doing a little sermon series. That day, the sermon was "Love Sacrifices; Love Saves." On Maundy Thursday, it was "Love Is Uncomfortable." On Good Friday, it was "Love Hurts." And today, the sermon is titled "Love Wins."

If you haven't heard the sermons, fear not. I will summarize them for you. In fact, I will summarize my sermons over the last week and the entire Bible, the Creation of the Universe, the Incarnation, the Passion and Crucifixion, the Resurrection and Ascension, the Great Commission, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Church, the Sacraments, and two millennia of Church tradition in this sermon. "But wait! There's more." I am going to summarize all of that for you in one sentence, indeed, three words.

If you leave here today remembering nothing else we did or said, remember this summary: God loves you. That's it. That's the summary. Now, if you're tired from this week's service, you can grab a nap until we recite the Creed.

For those of you still with me, as Jesus would, I'll tell you a parable. There was a parent. Even before the parent had a child, they were so excited to become a parent. They had immeasurable love for a child not even conceived yet. They imagined what their child would be like: What color would their hair be? What will delight them? What will they become?

When the child was born, the parent's already deep love just exploded. The parent saw in this tiny human possibility beyond imagining. As the child grew, the parent delighted in them, marveling at them discover themselves and the world around them.

As the child grew and became independent, they began making decisions immensely harmful to themselves. They became enslaved to drug addiction. Soon, scoring a hit was the only thing that mattered. The child repeatedly did violence to their own body, mind, and soul.

Seeing this deeply grieved the parent. The parent prayed, hoped, cried. The parent's love for their precious longed-for child, though, never wavered – not for a second.

The parent tried to talk to the child. The parent sent others to talk to the child. They all tried everything to pull this child out of addiction and on to a better path. There were moments when one thing or the other seemed to get through, but those moments were fleeting. Nothing seemed to stick. Not tender love. Not tough love. Not pleading. Not demanding.

One day, the child left the house to get drugs. The parent was used to this, but this time, the parent followed their child. On arriving where their child had gone, the parent saw a drug deal in progress. Then, the parent saw a gun pulled on their beloved child. The parent rushed over. Apparently, the child had gotten into an argument with the dealer. The parent tried to deescalate things. The parent pleaded, "Please don't hurt my child. You don't have to do this." The dealer was hearing none of it.

In an instant, the gun fired. The parent leaped in front of the child, shielding them. The dealer fled, and the parent and child were there alone, the parent dying from a gunshot. The child cried and pled: "I'm so sorry. None of this should have happened. It's all my fault. Please forgive me." As the parent lay dying in their child's arms, the parent said: "You had my forgiveness before you asked. There hasn't been a single day from before you were born until today that I didn't love you. I would sacrifice myself a thousand times to give you the chance to live a full and happy life. I only want goodness for you. I love you always, and I will be with you always." Then the parent died.

This parable is moving but not terribly original. This is a familiar trope. Similar stories, both fictional and drawn from real experiences, are told in books,

movies, and television shows. Here's the thing, though. This is the story of our faith. This is the story we celebrate today.

In the beginning, God created all that is and proclaimed everything that God shaped into being good. God made us, fashioned from the earth and animated by God's breath. As our Eucharistic Prayer A says, "in [God's] infinite love, [God] made us for [Godself]." God made us to experience and live in goodness.

Though, we sought to go our own way. We tried to separate ourselves from God, but God never abandoned us. God called to us: "Return to my loving embrace."

God kept trying. God sent prophets to call us back. God sent witnesses to God's love for us. God came to us Godself in the person of Jesus Christ, the Beloved. God sent Godself to us in and as love. As in the beginning, God joined the divine being with our humanity. God came as a baby, trusting us to care for God as God cares for us. God lived as one of us. God lived among us. God taught us about God's love for us and demonstrated that love.

Humanity tortured and executed God. Even then, God never abandoned us. God's love for us never wavered. We lifted love high, nailed to a cross to die, and God continued to give the divine essence into our hands, the ultimate witness that nothing – NOTHING – can come between us and God's love.

That wasn't all. This story does not end in death. No. Not even death can separate us from God's love. Early in the morning on the first day of the week, God loved God Incarnate out of the grave. I imagine the stone to the tomb rolling away in reverence for the Creator's uncontainable love.

At that tomb, in a place of death, even there, we find God's deep, abiding, unshakable love. At first, Mary cannot see that love through her grief. She weeps. Twice, she can't see that angels and Jesus are asking her, "Why are you weeping?" This isn't a failing on her part. Quite the opposite. Mary is prepared through some heroic feat of strength motivated by her love to carry Jesus' body by herself back to its resting place. God, though, doesn't rest. Love doesn't rest.

God never gives up on us. So, the third time, Jesus calls to her: "Mary! Look at me!" I imagine in a split second, the cloud of grief lifted and the memories of Jesus and the love he shared with her and all his followers came flooding back to Mary. Then she sees. She sees Jesus. She sees love risen and alive

in her midst. She sees that nothing can separate us from God's love. She sees that love wins.

When Mary proclaims to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," she is telling them so much more than that Jesus is alive. She is telling them that she has seen, she has witnessed, that God's love, God's love for us, is more powerful than any force in existence.

This is our story – not sin, not pain, not death. God's love is our beginning, middle, and eternity. This is what we proclaim when we proclaim the Resurrection. God loves each of us. God loves you. We shout "Alleluia" because love wins.

Beloved, Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.