

Context: Hosea 6:1-3
John 20:1—9;19—23
Eph:14—21

Text: Eph:3:17-19

“A MASTERPIECE OF LOVE”

Easter is a day to rejoice! It is a day to be filled with the grandeur of God. It is a day, not so much to talk, but to sing, to praise, to remember, to become awestruck again with the God who loves us with a love that surpasses any human description.

As I thought of what to say this Easter, my first thought was that of an image of a grand, expansive mural painted by the Master Creator Himself — the God of this huge, complex universe. I want to share this image with you that speaks to the title of this work of art - “A Masterpiece Of Love”. My hope is that you will see a God who loves us with a love that Paul sings as the “love that surpasses knowledge.” I pray you will see, with me, a God who reveals Himself as love from the beginning of time until time eternal. Imagine a huge mural that the Master artist reveals of Himself from the Garden of Eden to the New Heavens and Earth. Even though this mural is filled with so much history, let me highlight six critical places that sheds on light on what the Resurrection means for us living on the verge of the 21st century.

The **first** picture of love is found in the second chapter of Genesis. When God called the universe into being and saw all that He designed and created, the Scriptures say that it was very good. But something was missing. That something was people, man and woman, you and I. He loved us people. He loved us so much that He gave over the stewardship of His creation and entrusted it to our care and enjoyment. The God who created placed us at the center of the universe higher than the angels and only a step removed from him. The first picture I see is God bending down to his creation and handing over this cherished and magnificent gift called creation to those whom He created. It is like a parent bending over to a child and handing that child their most precious treasure just because that parent’s heart is filled with love and the joy of giving. God loves by entrusting Himself to us.

The second picture of love I see is found in the third chapter of the book of Exodus. It is the familiar story of God speaking to Moses through the burning bush. What caught my attention was how our God introduced Himself. He said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” When Moses was entrusted to carry out a mission on behalf of this God, he asked God how he should introduce Him to the Israelites he was sent to bring to freedom. God’s answer was to say, “I AM has sent me to you.” What God really said to Moses was that I am existence: I am life itself. I have a name and I come to individuals who have a name. I have chosen to become personally involved in your life and your struggles. Not only that, but I will be with you every step you take. I will not leave you in your time of need or suffering because life is too important for me. Life is not just what I have, but who I AM. What a great picture of love. The creator of life itself bending down to His creation to say I AM is with you for the long haul. God demonstrates His love for us by forever tying His own life to our life for our good and His glory.

The third picture of love I see is found in the 11th chapter of the book of Hosea. A lot of time has passed with those whom God loves with all His heart. Those to whom He entrusted His creation and His presence abandoned Him. They chased after little gods, gods made of wood, and stone, and metal. They chased after that which is life-less, that which brought death and

suffering. This God who loves us so, was not just angry, but deeply hurt and wounded by the unfaithfulness and ingratitude of those to whom He gave so much. And when they deserved to be destroyed, we look deep into the wounded heart of God and hear Him cry out: **“It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.... How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? For I am God, and not man - the Holy One among you. I will not come to destroy.”**

This God of love put Himself on the line again and said I will never abandon you no matter how much wrong you have done. I will provide a way for you to not be hurt. God showed His love for us by bending down and taking us by the arms to give us a sure way **out of** the consequences of our own sinful behavior.

The fourth picture of love I see is that of a baby named Jesus, born in a stable in Bethlehem. Luke says it so eloquently: “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.” What a marvelous picture of our Creator God. Instead of just speaking to his people, guiding them, giving them His power and resources from His dwelling place, He extended Himself by actually physically entering our dwelling place to be side by side with us. He entered to speak face to face with us about how deeply He loves us and showing that love in everyday, tangible and visible ways, even to death on a cross on Golgotha’s hill.

God again showed His love for us, not just by dying in our place, but also by opening the door to life itself that no sin or evil could close or conquer. The writer of Hebrews says it so beautifully: “Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” God again showed His great love for us by actually entering our world, entering our most fearful and dying places, substituted Himself so we could always stay alive, and then provided the way to maintain our life in His presence. He did that through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The fifth picture of love I see is what we celebrate today -the miracle of resurrection. This is not just a person coming back from the grave. That was already demonstrated by Jesus with Lazarus. This resurrection was something so unique that it is extremely difficult to even comprehend. With those who believe in some other god or spirit being, this event will be in total contradiction. For them, life after death means something that might be pleasant, but is very different from the miracle by this God whose name is I AM. The Apostle Paul tries to explain the unexplainable in his first letter to the Corinthians. He says: “But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come? If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body...And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.”

The resurrection event we celebrate today is that, through Jesus Christ, we are given a new body after this one is gone. It is like taking off one body and putting on another. It is a body that is just as real, just as tangible, and just as individual as this one - only it is equipped to go on forever. It is a body that cannot decay, cannot suffer, and cannot experience death in any sense ever again. It is not some type of melting into some spiritual, non—tangible oneness in the great beyond. This great God who so deeply loves us demonstrated that love again. Only this time, instead of bending down to come where we are, He bent down, picked us up, and brought us to where He is — forever.

The sixth picture in the mural of love I see is a continuation of the last picture. Our God wanted to assure us daily of the reality of this very special resurrection. So, He gave us another tremendous gift of Himself. He gave us His very own life—giving Spirit to actually dwell in us and not just outside of us. What a tremendous gift of love. God cares so deeply for us that He guarantees our future with Him by residing in each of us through His very own Holy Spirit. Jesus expresses it best as we read in the Gospel of John. He says: “If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth. . But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” And as the Apostle Paul tells us, “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.” This great and loving God wants us to be reassured of our future every minute of every day of the continuance of life after this life, as we now know it — a life in the presence of the embodiment of love itself.

The number seven in the Bible symbolizes perfection. The mural painted by the Master artist is perfect. There is a seventh picture. However, I will let you go home and read about it, let you imagine it, let you see the brilliant colors of it. It is the picture of the new heavens and earth to which we are headed. It is found in the book of Revelations, the picture given to the Apostle John in his later life. I do want to end and leave you with the words Paul sings out from the depth of gratitude and understanding in his heart to our hearts. It is my text today from the third chapter of Ephesians, verses 16-21:

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.” and Amen!