

Divine Romance (Part Two)

“God is love”

Reflection 50 in the series “A New World in the Morning”

When John writes about God being love and whoever living in love living in God and God in him (1 John 4:16), what he’s saying is not for the timid. To really love others is to challenge sometimes emphatically what is evil and hateful. It’s to ride out and meet evil, sometimes driven by a volcanic fury on behalf of those who are being victimized. It’s to see clearly what violent men do. Whatever their faith, creed or country. It’s to care intensely about injustice – to feel the auger of injustice bore deeply into one’s heart, and to stop those who are vicious and unloving at whatever risk to oneself. Dean Koontz in his book *By the Light of the Moon* depicts just this sort of transformation in one of his characters. Knowing now what it really is to care about people, he senses “deeper and more fearsome changes occurring, tectonic shifts in the deepest bedrock of his mind” (p. 148) empowering him to respond appropriately, strongly, forcefully, to what is hateful and unloving. I think that’s true. I think that’s what ought to happen.

What John is saying is not for the timid. To really love others is to expose evil, to expose pretension, to unmask the idols, to maybe even discount some of the world’s great heroes and to honor some who have long been discounted, to dance on society’s dividing lines, to tell the truth wanted or not, even to infuriate the powers and principalities of this world. But now this Son of Thunder knowing all this, after all the losses and struggles of his life, and still able to call down upon Rome an apocalypse, concludes: “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16).

Likewise for us – after all the years wrestling with God, being tested and challenged sometimes to the max, after dealing with people in all their flawed, outrageous humanity, not all good, not all bad, often trapped by culture and circumstance, complex, complicated and elusive, after all the wrongs of the church, the evils that have been done because of law-based religions and literalist interpretations of text, in spite of all this, no, because of all this, we must still conclude: “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.”

So there are texts that confound me. There are doctrines believed for hundreds of years that trouble me. People mystify me; good people mystify me. Tragedies appall me. Why certain things happen, I often don’t know. Life is often a mystery. I keep finding wisdom where I least expect it – in people with faith very different from mine. I find goodness where I was once told no goodness is. And so sometimes I am confused. But this is what I am learning – that there can be absolutely nothing between me and the God who is love: no text, no doctrine, no scriptural understanding, no judgment of others, no political position, no life experience, no tragedy, no setback, absolutely nothing between me and the God who is love.

That is the truth we learn from Jesus, endorsed late in his life by John, the Son of Thunder – nothing between you and the God who is love. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. It is this that is, that will be, the foundation for a new world in the morning, the great global

spiritual transformation on the threshold of which we now stand. So whatever we face, we choose in the Spirit of Christ the way of sacred love – the fundamental truth, the core truth, that God is love. Whatever happens in our lives, in the brightest days, yes, but also in the darkest nights, when life crashes in, when we are heartbroken and our souls are devastated, whatever happens, in any case, in every case, we will rethink whatever we have to rethink to choose the way of sacred love, the way of divine romance, the way that affirms that God is truly love, that God passionately pursues us and there is nothing more loving, nothing more truly romantic, than God. We will understand Scripture in new ways to do this. We will understand the nature of Scripture in new ways to do this. Every doctrine. Every teaching. When I teach about atonement, the cross of Jesus, when I teach about Gehenna, the fate of evil and those who are evil, I will teach it, I have to teach it, in ways that make it unmistakably clear that God is love. Otherwise it is no gospel at all.

So what I hope we are trying to do in our lives is to climb back up through the debris of the centuries and all the wrong stories we have been told, to struggle – scarred and wounded as we sometimes still are by those wrong stories – back up to the light, to the God who is love. Could we get back to our lost innocence? Could we recover our original goodness, the way we were created to be, luminous, radiant, shining with the image of God? Could we become so pure in heart that we can once again see that God is love, that whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” Could we be part of a new world in the morning?

The challenge then is to never let anything stand between you and the sacred truth that God is love, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting people’s sins against them (2 Corinthians 5:19), that God’s heart reaches out all people and his love never fails. God is love! What does that mean for you? Lest I’ve been in any way theoretical though I really don’t think I have, let me give you this one rule of thumb: “God loves you at least as much as the person who loves you the most.” Isn’t that great? I got that from Dennis Linn and Sheila Fabricant Linn’s clever little book *Good Goats: Healing Our Image of God*. First time I read it, it made perfect intuitive sense. Because God is God and God loves more.

Now don’t let anything stand between you and this sacred truth, absolutely nothing, no experience, no set of circumstances, no disappointment, and no doctrine, no matter how many Christians believe it and for how long, no doctrine, absolutely nothing between you and the God who is love. And it is on this foundation that we begin to see the coming great global spiritual awakening, when people who deep in their souls still believe in God find in churches that the God they still sense is there and not far from them.

– Dale Pauls