



Dan Nolta

Much has happened since I last wrote for *Fruit of the Vine*. In March I had a stroke, ended up in Portland at the Oregon Health Sciences University hospital for five days, and then back to Friendsview Retirement Community Health Center for three weeks. With two weeks of therapy, I was pronounced whole.

In the middle of that recovery, two of our daughters decided that their mom and dad needed to move. While I laid on my back and watched it happen, they moved us “lock, stock, and barrel” into the main building at Friendsview. We are now comfortably inhabiting a one-bedroom apartment in the Creekside wing of Friendsview. Judi still has her piano, I have a place to write, and all is well.

A couple of years ago I asked our daughter Dixie to sing, “The Love of God” at my funeral...someday, that is. She then asked, “Why do you want me to sing that song?” I gave her a kind of cursory answer, then thought about it for awhile, and decided to use these devotional thoughts as my answer.

BIBLE READING: 1 John 4:7-12

*The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell:
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell*

With the words above flying in my face, I begin the description of God's love, even though it says in essence that tongue or pen can never tell.

God is love. That all-encompassing statement we find in 1 John 4 is followed by a most intriguing and challenging narrative. God's love was demonstrated by the gift of his Son as an atoning sacrifice. Love one another, acknowledge Jesus, live in love. The narrative continues taking us right to the day of judgment.

If we are honest, isn't it the day of judgment that concerns us? My profession is this: "I am absolutely counting on the love, mercy, and grace of God on the day of judgment. If the demonstration of God's love for me in the sacrifice of Jesus for my sins is not true; if I have not acknowledged Jesus as Savior and I have not lived in love to the best of *his ability in me*, then there is little hope that I shall find a home in heaven with God."

SONG: Amazing Love

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, somehow enable my feeble words to convey the meaning that your love has in my own life. May they demonstrate how utterly dependent I am upon that love. When all else fails, there is your love.

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: 1 John 4:9-10

*The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave his Son to win;
his erring child he reconciled,
and pardoned from his sin.*

Do those words ignite your imagination? What had the “guilty pair” done? We put a great deal of importance on how big the sin was or the class of the sin. Was it a “big sin” or a “little sin”; one of omission or one of commission?

What were they guilty of? Or were they just *guilty*, as is the whole human race? “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

In the end it makes no difference. Love compelled our Savior to the cross in a once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sin. The cross extracted a painful price to be paid for our salvation, but in the end the price was paid, and you and I are counted among the redeemed.

Each day that passes I count on the promise of these verses more and more. God is love, an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Are they really covered by the blood shed on that cross? Oh yes, they are!

SONG: Blessed Assurance

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, assure my heart of your demonstrated love, right up to the day that I pass through the gates to meet you.

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: Psalm 136:1-9

*O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure—
The saints' and angels' song.*

Can one imagine a love that endures forever? It never wears out or fades away, it is never diminished by our neglect of God or our outright sin.

My mind goes back over the characteristics of love in 1 Corinthians 13 and settles on the adjective *patient*. God displays a holy patience with our human nature. He patiently loves us as we grow in maturity and our nature is transformed into one like his own.

While we are in that transformative process he forgives our sin(s), separating them from us as far as the east is from the west. He forgets them as if they never happened, but we are left with the residual pain of remembering them. But that remembering causes us to love him all the more for his gracious patience, and the “circle of love” is completed.

With David in Psalm 51 I would say, “my sin is always before me.” And that sin most certainly reminds me of God’s merciful, gracious love. A love that I believe has endured, and will endure until that time when he calls me home.

SONG: Love Lifted Me

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Holy Father, for your gift of forgiveness I thank you. I am so grateful for the gift that has set me free from the guilt and penalty of sin.

—Dan Nolte

BIBLE READING: Deuteronomy 4:35-40

When hoary time shall pass away,
And earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,
When men who here refuse to pray,
On rocks and hills and mountains call,
God's love so sure, shall still endure,
All measureless and strong;*

We might correctly paraphrase this stanza as saying: *When ancient times have passed away and we have witnessed the fall of earthly thrones and kingdoms, God's love will still endure.* It is borne out by the Scripture we have read as it tells how God in his love chose a generation, and then continued by choosing their descendants to be favored with his love.

God's love is timeless. It is sure; you can depend on it. It is enduring; it does not fade out or somehow wither away. The verse of the song says: "All measureless and strong"—not to be measured out but to be found boundless, without border, without limits. That is the love that I depend upon.

**Hoary: ancient*

SONG: Jesus Loves Me

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, I live in the "now" of my life. Please make my past, the past. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from all my sin. May my sins be truly forgiven and separated "as far as the east is from the west."

—Dan Nolte

BIBLE READING: Romans 5:12-18

*God's love so sure, shall still endure,
All measureless and strong;
Redeeming grace to Adam's race—
The saints' and angels' song.*

As these devotionals are being written during election time, I am acutely aware of the deep divide in our country. It breaks my heart to see our people so divided on most every line that can be drawn: race, gender, rich, and poor. Can't we all just get along?

The love of God is the heart of the matter. The challenge to love one another lies before me even today. A former pastor of mine often challenged us (translate: me) from the pulpit to see people as Jesus sees them.

When I worked at the sheriff's department in Pierce County, I found myself in the hilltop area of Tacoma, Washington. It was a very wet and rainy day. I had just visited with a department corrections officer who was ill.

As I was walking down the sidewalk away from his home, a bus pulled up to the curb and a young woman stepped off. By all appearances (my judgment) she was mentally ill. I went into protective mode, warning myself, "don't make eye contact, look away." She came toward me and with a big smile on her face said, "Smile, Jesus loves you!" I had failed the challenge once again.

SONG: Jesus Loves the Little Children

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father I am thankful for your love that includes me, the chief of sinners.

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: Psalm 36:5-7

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stock on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;*

Can you imagine going back to using a quill pen? Dip it in the ink and write maybe a few words, and then re-dip it to continue writing.

I have recently seen advertisements for printers that claim they have a two-year supply of ink. My, how times have changed! We thought it was great when we could buy a small, stand-alone printer and print from little ink cartridges. First it was only black ink, then colored ink, and now 3-D printers. “Where it stops, nobody knows.”

In total realization that the words of the song are only metaphorical, they have somehow captured my heart till I can say: I really don’t care much that they are only metaphorical, I love them; they resonate with my heart. I can imagine the scroll being unrolled as descriptive word after descriptive word is inked onto the parchment—and there is not enough ink in the ocean to finish describing the love of God.

SONG: Wonderful Grace of Jesus

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord God, heavenly Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is by your grace that we have been redeemed. Your love is unfailing, far reaching, and infinite. It has pierced my heart and brought peace.

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: Psalm 103:10-12

*Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

Today is my last opportunity to explain to you the “why” of my request that “The Love of God” be sung at my funeral.

I go back to a time when my kids were young (all five of them) and we were all stuffed into a 24’ Tolly Craft with another family, who fortunately had only one child still at home to bring on that small boat. Imagine a starry sky spread before us—no ambient light nearby. That was the starry sky that was laid out for my viewing while I was on that week-long trip into the San Juan Islands. The song, to be sung at my funeral, was scarcely on my internal radar that night, but as I look back it was very appropriate to the moment.

A parchment scroll spread across that sky could never begin to be long enough to enable the scribe to finish describing the love of God. And so it is with this “scribe.” While my carefully chosen words have now been demonstrated to be inadequate, please take my words and sense my deeply grateful heart, thanking the Lord Jesus who made it all possible by his death on the cross, his blood shed for the sins of mankind—of which I am only one!

SONG: When We All Get to Heaven

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, Lord, for your amazing grace that includes me in your plan and affords me the opportunity to spend eternity with you in heaven.

—Dan Nolta