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Street Church: Love Abides

May 4, 2021 | 0 comments

I remember some months ago when Marvin came to respite. He was so lonely and unsettled. He didn't trust people. Making friends was hard. Chelsea began spending some time with him. Under Amy's love and care, we learned that Marvin liked to cook. So does Amy. She was just the person to help Marvin put together a book of recipes. He had a great time putting fun meals together in the big respite kitchen. When it was time to move on from respite, Marvin was so nervous about his next steps. In a home of his own, he was worried he would go right back to being alone. Without anyone to cook for, he feared he would become purposeless. Chelsea and Amy worked hard to help Marvin not just move on, but transition well. Turns out there was just the place for that new cookbook in Marvin's new apartment; and in a sense, he learned that all the friends and community he had gathered during his homelessness, could go with him!

And Marvin gave us something, as well—a new “house blessing” tradition!



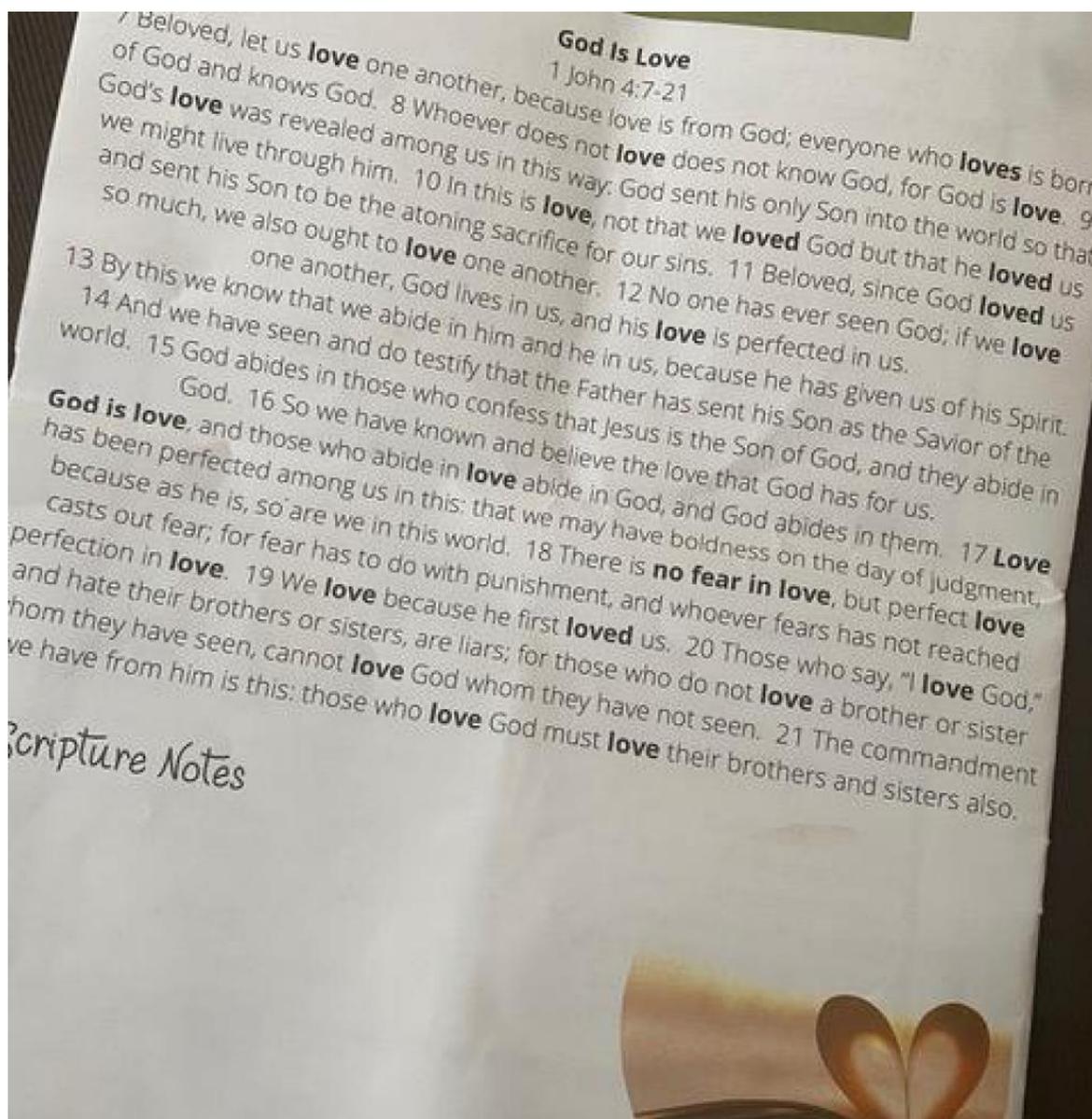
Now that street church has become a part of Micah's fabric, we have dreamed of many ways it can play a vital role in making homes out of the many houses we fill each year. After walking Marvin so gently through the process of settling back into a home and seeing how much praying over the rooms in his house meant to him, we realized how important it is to mark a move back into housing as a really special turning point. Our neighbors lives are so often marked by tragedy, trauma, disappointment and loss. No matter how many good things have happened or continue to come their way, it is the dark moments that they remember. It is the painful turns in their lives that keep them stuck and blind them to the successes, the good things, they are achieving. Yes, street church will mark the sad moments, prayer concerns, heartaches, and even the deaths of our neighbors, their family and friends. But I hope we will increasingly reflect as fondly on street church as a place that celebrates, honors the beautiful moments, the precious hours, the wins, the resurrections, as well.

For those reasons, and many more, I want to share that Marvin has become a budding leader at Street Church. I hope you will celebrate with us that Marvin has not let his exit from homelessness be an exit from our community. In fact, he has been more a part now than he ever could have without a permanent place to lay his head. He keeps coming back and learning that God has many, so many, uses for him.



I realize when I look across our street church congregation these days that many of those who gather with us are now stably housed. It is a stark contrast to the demographic of those who gathered with us two, three, even one year ago. The change probably has a lot to do with pandemic-related efforts that have allowed us to shelter most of our street homeless in hotels for the better part of a year now. That has also given us the time to move an extraordinary number of people, like Marvin, into permanent homes. I also think, it is easier to be part of something like street church when a person feels settled, when they feel home. Our recently housed neighbors don't always come immediately after moving into their homes, but it is not unusual for a new face to join us within a few months or weeks after their transiency has been put to rest. When we know the place to which we can come home, it is a lot easier to turn our minds eye to other forms of home, the places God's love is fully known.

The Gospel text this week, 1 John 4: 7-21, illuminates with the word love. But in between the highlighted text in our bulletin, another word—abide—jumped out at me. While abide has many definitions, it is used in this text to signify a dwelling place, a location in which love lives, a home of sorts.



"God abides in us."

"Those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."

Love, indeed, is not like air or water. It is tangible. It has to abide somewhere. Perhaps that's why it's hard to love others when they don't live anywhere. Our neighbors can't even begin to love themselves until they live somewhere. In turn, the love our neighbors were born to share can't grow and be offered to others until they have, not just a place to sleep, but to live. And even then God's love cannot bloom and multiply the way it is intended until it is planted in a place it can be cared for.

One of the magical things about being a church that worships outside is that there are metaphors all around us that speak to the wonders of our creation. This week the dandelions and buttercups were in full bloom. Chelsea's son, Evan, spontaneously brought her a bouquet of dandelion seeds mid-sermon that brought a special illustration to her message.



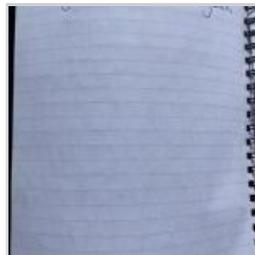
Chelsea explained, "Where the seeds land is a way we can understand God at work." Like us, they often don't land in the most convenient, logical places. But God desires that all of us find that place where love abides. With a place to dwell and put down roots, God's love anchors us and forms us into a relentless creation whose job it is to fly away and plant more dandelions.

Notably, we probably don't like thinking of ourselves or our neighbors as dandelions, a less-desirable weed that some of us make great strides to eliminate from our yards. But I can't think of a much more plentiful, relentless and resilient bud in God's creation. It does not discriminate between rich yards or poor, black or white, public or private. By the time someone cuts it down, it has already seeded itself somewhere else. Sounds an awful lot like God's love.



Thanks be to God for a community that mourns together and celebrates together, worships together and fellowships together; survives the streets together and goes home together. May God abide in all of us and the love of the seeds that are planted be multiplied.

Meghann



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