

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

May 24, 2026  
Pentecost Sunday

John 10:19-23  
Acts 2:1-21  
Psalm 104:24-34, 35b  
1 Cor. 12:3b-13

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If you were to testify about the love God, what would you say?

It seems like a straightforward question and the answer would seem to be just as clear cut. After all, isn't love fairly central to who we are as Christians?

And for many of us our testimony about God's love typically includes all the right sentiments.

- It is unconditional.
- It is sacrificial.
- It is selfless.
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In other words, we understand the love of God to be poured out to each of us no matter who we are or where we are from. I think of it as being poured out in eager abundance. **God can't wait to love us.** And as a kid, every time I sang Jesus Loves Me that is what I envisioned. A God who couldn't wait to love me.

That feels like a pretty good way to describe to someone what God's love is like.

But, here's a question that is a little more challenging. How would we describe the way we practice God's love?

Take the qualities of God's love and apply them to your own actions. And then ask...how are we doing when it comes to love that is unconditional, sacrificial, and selfless? Are we pouring it out to one another in eager abundance? Not just to the folks we like or agree with (that's not necessarily unconditional and it doesn't require much sacrifice or selflessness). I'm talking about eager abundance to everyone. All Y'all.

As I was writing my sermon I started doing a little survey of church websites...all different denominations. And I continued to run across one troubling consistent teaching. That is that although many churches testify to the eager abundant love of God, more often than not the eagerness they claim is squelched when someone doesn't adhere to their specific brand of religious belief.

In fact, when you dig down deep enough, you start to find that God's love as defined by many churches and by many people has a lot of qualifiers. And...the unconditional part of the equation is often the first to go.

The theological logic they profess?

If you rebel against God (in however they may define rebellion), you become estranged from God. That estrangement opens you to God's wrath and you become incapable of returning to God.

This isn't language we are familiar with in the Episcopal church but it is language used on a website for one of the major evangelical churches in the US. And this belief is not uncommon. I grew up hearing similar perspectives. Beliefs that taught our sin could make us incapable of returning to God.

That hurts my heart just repeating those words. Because I know that "sin" is a powerful tool depending on who chooses to define it and how they choose to define it.

My research made me wonder...what happened to God's love that was unconditional, sacrificial, and selfless? What happened to the embodiment of that love?

Let me tell you a story that has brought this home for me this week.

If you followed Christian praise music in the 90's you may remember a song called *Testify to Love* by the group Avalon.

The chorus goes...

*For as long as I shall live  
I will testify to love  
I'll be a witness in the silences  
When words are not enough  
With every breath I take  
I will give thanks to God above  
For as long as I shall live  
I will testify to love*

What do you hear in those words?

Melissa Greene, one of the original members of Avalon describes the song this way...

*"Testify to Love was our biggest hit. It is a song about love without exception, love that reaches every corner of creation, love that testifies through every star in every sky. We sang it night after night to arenas of people."*<sup>1</sup>

In other words, this was a song that on the surface conveyed love without exception.

Unconditional, sacrificial, selfless love. And man did they sing it out. And people's hands were in the air, some would cry, others would be on their knees saying:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://melissagreene.substack.com/p/testify-to-love>

*Yes...this is what God's love is all about! Thank you, Jesus! I can testify to that kind of love.*

But then Melissa goes on to say that while this song was at its most popular her bandmate, Michael Passons, was kicked out of Avalon for being gay. So, while this song was being sung in stadiums and on car stereos and in worship services, Michael Passons had fallen into that category of estrangement...from God and from those whom he loved.

Apparently, God's love had a few limits.

The love they were testifying to, the love they were encouraging from you and from me was conditional, limited, and self-serving, defining a faith perspective that pointed a finger right at anyone deemed to be sinful and therefore estranged from God, not even worthy of the love of friends and family. The doors were shut.

I wonder how many of you have found yourselves on the outside of those limits. Estranged. Told you were less than worthy of God's love. If you have been there, I am sorry. I know how much it hurts. I know how much you just want to believe in your heart that God loves you. That your family will love you. That your friends will love you.

But here's the Good News...now, almost 20 years later, Melissa and Michael have rerecorded *Testify to Love*. It has taken 20 years for Michael to reclaim the words of this song and live into its intention to stand as a beacon of love without exception. His courage has shown what living God's love is truly about. And this past week a wave of open hearts has emerged as this song has become an anthem for the eager abundance of God's love. For everyone. No exceptions. No limits.

A love that is not transactional.

A love that is not exclusive.

A love that will never ever separate you from God.

And when we come together for Pentecost we are testifying as a body of Christ to this grand expansive embracing love. When the Holy Spirit descends, we are told that the Spirit descended on *all* who were gathered. All y'all. We hear the words of Joel's vision that God, "...will rain down God's spirit upon all human beings from every nation." It's the moment God's love is poured out in eager abundance to all of humanity. And make no mistake...there are no qualifiers or limits.

It's a moment of healing and restoration. A moment of hope. A moment of radical reconciliation and renewal.

So to anyone who would tell you that you are outside of God's love, for anyone who would question your worth in God's eyes, Pentecost stands as your reminder...

And God breathes love and life into your very being. Into the darkest of places, into the deepest of hurts. That's the love we testify to as followers of Christ. A love that is beautiful and good. A love that breaks down every barrier and builds up every life. A love that is eager and abundant.

Because...For as long as we shall live  
we will testify to love.