

**Love Rescue Me**  
**Romans 13: 8-14**  
**Chris Clark**

It's 6:00am and I'm feeling groggy, but I know this is the only chance I'll get for the day. Quiet time comes rarely these days, so forcing myself up at sunrise is my one opportunity for silence and alone time. I slip on some socks and make my way past the kid's bedroom, hoping the whirring of their fans and my nimble steps down the hallway won't stir them – this is my daily Mission Impossible routine. Finding my way to the kitchen, I begin the morning coffee brewing ritual. The smell of freshly ground beans and the gurgle of boiling water are a cathedral in time.

I then catch the not so subtle sound of 6 year old tip-toes skirting around the fireplace into our dining room. I pretend not to hear. Out of the corner of my eye I catch a few wisps of blonde hair floating behind the dining room wall. Continuing my feigned obliviousness to the small thundering ninja trying to sneak her way to the kitchen island, she makes one final “clop, clop, Clop CLOP!” to situate herself on the barstool chair until I final turn around. “Oh my goodness! How did you sneak up on me again?”, a huge proud smile consuming her face.

It wasn't always this way. I used to hate my morning time being interrupted. I needed this time to recuperate – heck, these little punks owe this to me! (side note, “little punk” is a term of endearment in our household). Over the last few months I've oddly grown fond of these little morning interruptions as moments where I get to show love to our kids by joining them in episodes of wonder and silliness.

“There are so many ways to love God,” tweets author and educator David Dark. When I think of my morning interruptions with my kids, this small bit of “Twitturgy” comes to mind. He'll often share it alongside a video, statement, or picture of people embodying ways of life that bring beauty, liberation, reconciliation, repentance, wonder, joy, justice. In a world that can be very disconnected this liturgical line reminds that we encounter and embody love in the realm of flesh, bone, relationship, and soil

Paul seems to be doing very much the same for the fledgling church in Rome. After 11 chapters of expounding on the love of God through Christ, he brings the conversation out of the theological stratosphere and into the realm of space, time, and matter. We'd do well not to think of this as ethical after thoughts, but the place where the rubber meets the road. Of course he refers to the commandments, but these are not just rules and regulations to follow. One of the other lectionary texts for this week was Exodus 14, the story of God liberating a people from the tyranny of an empire and its hard hearted ruler. Upon fleeing their enslavement, God gives Moses a list of 10 commands to help God's people reorient themselves to the fullness of freedom. These commands

stood in contrast to the commands and expectations of the Egyptian empire under which they existed.

Under the first century Roman empire existed such expectations as well. To the emperor was owed honor and allegiance; to benefactors were owed money, possessions and honor; slaves owed service and their lives; wives owed submission...you get the picture. This is the framework, and yet Paul exhorts Christians in Rome to “owe” nothing but love. A subversion of the status quo. It’s a command that calls into question the expectations and things owed under the imperial reign of the day. What expectations of modern day empire might God be asking us to subvert with our responsibility to love? At the very least, the call of Christ’s love is a call to bend our knee in the honor of our neighbor and not on their back.

If you want to fulfill the law, the purposes of God, love is the only thing that will get us there. Theologian M. Shawn Copeland reminds us that the church finds its call in the flesh and bone incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth, “who calls us to break bonds imposed by imperial design, to imagine and grasp and realize ourselves as his own flesh, as the body of Christ.” In her book *Enfleshing Freedom* she writes that “acts of justice-doing, empire critique, love and solidarity” are what mark us as the Word made Flesh in the world. Through these acts the church is called to join the Spirit in the work of New Creation.

There are so many ways to love God.

In public it looks like justice. It looks like the long lineage of cries for equity and peace. It looks like feet on the ground marching, like the witness of Bayard Rustin and Septima Clark, like all those today who are standing on their shoulders. The banner of love for God in Jesus Christ cannot be waved at the expense and detriment of our fellow human beings. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. The love of the Gospel does not seek proximity to power but speaks truth to power. The love and life of Christ stands anathema to anything that tears at the fabric of our shared common humanity.

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It looks like the gentleness of tending to the world of a child. Empathizing with what they are struggling to process and communicate emotionally. As a father I’ve had to remind myself over and over and over again that this is a gift – an opportunity – and not an inconvenience (side note confession: it still feels like an inconvenience more often than not). But I stand on the shoulders of people like my father and Fred Rogers. My father who journaled fairly regularly about his experience of being a dad – a journal he then gifted me the day I turned 18. In it he chronicled much of his joys and some failures of being a parent, but the common thread running through it all was a deep love for me. And then there’s Fred Rogers, who in his 30 years of work helped children all over the world understand that their inner lives – their feelings and emotions – were mentionable and manageable. Standing on the shoulders of these two men, I’ve been given wisdom of what it looks like for a man to be gentle, loving, and emotionally empathetic.

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This year we had no idea what we were going to do as a youth ministry. Almost everything was out the window. Our Youth Vision Team came to the conclusion that centering creativity in our ministry with young people was our new direction. We decided to pursue the idea that creative outlets are a way by which they might work out their experiences, questions, and even their theology. I began on a small scale by asking a few youth this summer to answer the question “How has this pandemic and moment of social upheaval changed or transformed you?” Through various mediums, young people in our church community responded with hope, questions, and unknown theological prowess. Despite everything being turned upside down and the world feeling very dark, making space for young people to engage in creativity is one small way we’re shedding some light on the goodness of God’s world.

There are so many ways to love God.

How is your love of God embodied toward your neighbor as yourself? You know what time it is, how it is the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers. Salvation was nearer to Paul and the church in Rome just like it is nearer to us as the Church today. Because the saving, re-creating work of Jesus Christ is always waiting just ahead of us to rescue us from our blind spots, our shame, our rage, our fear, our greed, our apathy. Love of God and neighbor takes the form of the Cross. It means giving up our claims to ourselves and our claims over others and being recalibrated by the Spirit. May we wake up, rise, and clothe ourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.