

*“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.”*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Well, it’s Father’s Day once again, that day set aside to honour dad—or at least to acknowledge that dad is entitled to a special day, just as mom is. But Mother’s Day and Father’s Day are as different as mothers and fathers are themselves. Mother’s Day was first celebrated in 1872; Father’s Day was first celebrated in 1910. And while President Wilson set the second Sunday in May as Mother’s Day in 1912, it wasn’t until 1966 that President Johnson signed a presidential proclamation declaring the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of June as Father’s Day.

The differences go on. Restaurants tell us that Mother’s Day is their second busiest day of the year. Father’s Day, though, is just another Sunday. Mothers are given special gifts to brighten their days. Dads receive gifts, too—usually something very practical, and so we have the stereotype of a new tie, black socks or a new tool of some kind. I was looking for some one-liners about Father’s Day, and although I have several books of one liners and quotes, the majority of them say lots about mothers, but not much about fathers. Even in the church, there is a distinction. Mother’s Day is viewed by many as a church festival and God deliver the preacher who fails to remember this. Father’s Day just passes by in silence. Some of this is changing, as advertisers pick up on the opportunity that any celebration gives for an increase in sales. But no matter how hard we try, Father’s Day will never rival the importance—and the impact—of Mother’s Day.

In part that has to do with the way we see mothers and fathers. Mothers are seen as the nurturers and the care-givers of the family. Fathers are practical people. They may be the head of the house, but that is often seen as a corporate position far removed from the everyday management and operation of the family. They are concerned with rules, with work and with the house. It is mothers who are concerned with the home. We hold up a mother’s love for her children as the purest and strongest of loves. But fathers are seen in a different light. We know that fathers care and fathers love, but somehow we perceive this to be different than the love of a mother for her children.

Now these are terrible generalizations. After all, fathers and mothers really aren’t different. They both love their children. They both care about the family, and about the things that make a house a home. They may simply express it in different ways. But even the greatest love of an earthly parent does not come close to the boundless love of our heavenly Father. Paul reminds us of the greatness of that love when he says: *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* In the redemptive love of Christ, we see not only the greatest of all loves, but a love that only our Father in heaven can give.

Love is a very marvellous thing. It is also a mysterious thing. It never ceases to amaze me that my wife loves me. After all, I’m no Prince Charming. I am not rich, I am not as dashing as some famous movie star. I’m sure that she could recite for you a long list of my faults and imperfections. If she gets tired, I’m sure my children would be willing to pick up the slack. And yet, my wife loves me. My children love me. Isn’t that amazing? As I stand here as your pastor, I know that you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, also know my faults. Yet I believe that you love me, too. I may not be a great charismatic speaker. I’m not entertaining or even enthralling. I don’t have the flash and appeal of some of the tv evangelists. And yet, you pray for me. You work with me. You support me. You receive me in love as a brother in Christ.

How is it that I, an imperfect person, can be the recipient of such love? Well, maybe we need to turn it all around. After all,

my wife knows my faults—but I also know hers. My children know my weaknesses, just as I see their weaknesses. And you, dear friends, aren't always a prize, either. But still I love my wife. I love my children. And I love you.

It is an amazing thing that in this imperfect world, there can be any love at all. The apostle John has an answer to how this can be: ***“We love because he first loved us.”*** (1 John 4:19, ESV) It is the wonderful love that only the Father can give that enables us to love one another. It is His love for us that empowers us to forgive one another and to see beyond the sinfulness and weaknesses that are so much a part of each and every one of us. Yes, it is amazing that we sinful, imperfect people can love one another. But let's be honest. Even we, who may have learned to love imperfect people, don't love everyone the same way. We love our family, because they are our family. We love our friends—but they are people whom we have come to know and appreciate. We love our church family, for we see the people around us as those who also were redeemed by the blood of Christ. But what about the murderer on death row? What about the sexual predator who has abused children? What about the drunk driver, the drug dealer, the foreigner, or even the non-believer?

That is why the most amazing love this world can ever know is the love that only God, our Father, can give. Look at the words that Paul uses to describe us in our text. He calls us ***ungodly***; he reminds us that we are ***sinners***; he tells us that we were ***enemies of God***. And yet, Paul says, God loved us. He doesn't love us because we changed our attitude towards Him. Paul reminds us that we were powerless to change our attitude or our actions towards God. God doesn't love us because He got to know us better, and suddenly decided that we weren't all that bad. After all, God knows us better than we know ourselves. He sees the wickedness that fills our hearts—including the hidden and secret sins that we don't even want to admit to ourselves. Our sins separate us from Him. He will indeed judge all the things that we do that are wrong in His sight. No, He doesn't love our sinfulness, but in love He comes to set us free from our sinfulness. Paul assures us that while we were still sinners; while we were still ungodly; while there was still nothing worthy of His love, He sent His Son to establish peace between us and Himself. God is love. God has always loved us. He has loved even the unlovable.

What is more, God has demonstrated that love in a way that leaves no doubt of His love. Our text says: ***For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** When Jesus came into this world, born in that manger in Bethlehem, He revealed God's great love for sinners like you and me. As Jesus lived in perfect holiness under His own divine law, He revealed His love for you and me. And when He let the soldiers stretch out His arms and nail them to the cross, He revealed a love greater than anything the world has known or could know. We hear His words from the cross: ***“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*** (Luke 23:34, ESV) On that cross, the holy, sinless, blameless Son of God gives His life for sinners, for the ungodly, for His enemies. He gave His life for you and for me. He does it that we might have forgiveness, so that we might be reconciled to God through His death.

Even then, the love that only God can give does not stop. It goes further. It goes to that tomb where the body of the Saviour was laid. That love of God is revealed in the resurrection of Christ—for Christ lives as our assurance that peace with God has been made; that we have been justified by His grace; that we will, indeed, enjoy life in its fulness with Him in His glorious Kingdom.

This wondrous love that only the Father can give changes everything. It changes us. God no longer calls us sinners. John, the disciple who refers to himself as ***“That disciple whom Jesus loved”***. (John 21:7, ESV) declares: ***“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”*** (1 John 3:1, ESV) For the sake of His Son, God declares us righteous in His sight. He reconciles us to Himself. He no longer longer speaks of us as His enemies, but as dear, beloved children. He gives us His Spirit, that we may believe in His love—and through that Spirit-given faith experience this love that only the Father can give. By faith we live a new life, free from the sins of the past. What wondrous love this is! How blessed we are in His love!

Col. T. E. Lawrence, the man who became known as Lawrence of Arabia, was crossing the desert with some Arabs. They rode with their hoods covering their heads for protection from the wind and sand. With the food supply low and their water on a minimum ration, one Arab noticed an empty camel. “Where is Jasmin?” he asked. “Who is Jasmin?” another Arab answered. A third explained, “Jasmin is that yellow-faced man from Mann. He killed a Turkish tax collector and fled into the desert.” It soon became evident that Jasmin had fainted in the heat and fallen off his camel. Finally, one Arab said, “What does it matter? Jasmin was not worth half a crown.” So they hunched down on their camels and rode on. But Lawrence turned and rode back in the blazing heat. After an hour and a half he found Jasmin, blinded and almost mad from the heat and thirst. Lawrence shared some of his precious water, put him on his camel, and brought him back. That night when they reached the others, the Arabs were amazed. Jasmin, not worth half a crown, was saved by Lawrence at the risk of his own life.

We were not worth half a crown—if anything we were worth so much less. Yet it is for worthless people that Christ died. It was for people like Jasmin—for the sinner, the ungodly, the enemies, those hostile to God. It was for people like you and me. This is love—the love that always was, always is, and always will be the love that only the Father can give. In that love, we live in love with one another. In that love, we seek to love the unlovable. And in that love, we have hope and a future, saved and blessed in the love only God can give—the love that He makes known to us in His Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.