

## Love and the Really Real

The whole of all the Christian “good news” could be summed up in this one point: that when God gazes upon us, upon each and every one of us, God sees someone who is beloved and cherished.

God does not see the imperfections we like to magnify or that the world tells us make us less than loveable, but gazes upon us seeing all of the possibility that was planted in us at our birth.

In my years as priest this has been my biggest surprise and my greatest challenge---I continually find it almost impossible to convince people that they are truly, madly, deeply beloved of God. There seems to be just too many competing messages---messages from family, messages from the media, and sadly even many messages from the Church that drown out these soft and life changing words from God:

“You are my child, my beloved; with you I am well pleased. This is God’s greatest gift to us but one we often find so hard to receive.

We first hear these words as Jesus stands on the shores of the Jordan river and surpassing all expectations, Jesus just wades right on out--- he wades waist deep into human brokenness and in so doing he tells us God is not of wrath and judgment, but of compassion, mercy, and forgiveness.

It can be so easy to believe that the world in all its striving and division is our true reality. But when we listen and follow Jesus we are offered a very different reality—a reality that is just as present to us should we decide to reach out and grasp it and hold onto it as the deeper truth of our lives.

The world *can* be harsh and cold---Jesus knows this all too well. God’s reality does not deny that. It *is* true that on any given day we may well face the possibility of feeling unloved or abandoned. We might feel rejected or abandoned by a parent or other loved one; by a job, by a church, or by our own self-condemnation, or maybe by media images that tell us we simply do not measure up.

But in the *really* real---God’s reality---rejection, shame, and abandonment never have the last word---the last word always belongs to God and God’s last word is always love. God speaks right into the heart of our pain and offers the words, “You are my beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

In the heart of any perceived rejection or diminishment of your soul close your eyes, let the noise of the world fall away and listen...listen for that voice soft and gentle as a dove because it *is* seeking you out. And if you will allow yourself to hear, you will have no doubt; you will never feel less-than or fearful again.

Jesus’ whole life is about claiming solidarity with the fragile human condition. And it is in our own ordinary daily lives that we claim solidarity with God’s hope for all of humankind.

We have all been given the gift of God's eternal undying love---it is our truest and best inheritance. We are sons and daughters of God. We do not have to spend our whole lives trying to earn what we already have. In the end it is up to us to claim God's love as our own and live into this God centered reality for all we're worth.

The full and total sum of God's love is a great gift. When finally received this profound gift changes us. This profound gift defines us. When shared, this gift has the power to transform not only our own lives, but the world in which we live---a world desperately hungry to be invited into the *really* real world of God's compassion, unity, mercy and forgiveness.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+