

The Streams of Love and Wisdom

A Sermon

Preached by Rev. D'cn David R. Sincerbox
on Sunday, July 26, 2026
at Apostles Anglican Church in Knoxville, TN

Lectionary Lessons

1 Kings 3:3-14

Psalms 119:121-126

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-50

Romans 8:26-27

Brothers and sisters, it's been at least eight years since I, as one of your deacons, have preached from this pulpit. I want to thank our Rector, Jack King, for giving me this opportunity to preach this morning. Thank you, Jack.

In years gone by, this morning's sermon would've taken on the form of biblical exposition. Because of my Presbyterian background, I would've delved into St. Paul's Roman's passage, especially on predestination. Father John Roop, you have been spared this morning from having to hear we quote from Jonathan Edwards. Instead, I'm going to explain how this morning's Bible lessons have applied to my personal journey for these past eight years.

As some of you know, and others of you who are new to our family here at Apostles don't know, my life took an unexpected turn into a ministry I never anticipated. That was the ministry of caregiving for my wife who suffered from Parkinson's Disease and Lewy body dementia. Caregiving is a 24/7, 365-day ministry. It kept me away from serving as one of your deacons. My ministry was in my physical home on Downing Drive rather than in my spiritual home here on Robinson Road. Later, my second physical home became the Nursing Center at Little Creek where my wife spent her last days.

Caregiving can be exhausting. It is often lonely. But it is also a necessary ministry tending to someone who can no longer tend for themselves. Caregiving is a ministry of love; it is love expressed in very practical and necessary acts. We now at Apostles have a caregiving support group that meets the third Thursday of each month at 11:00 a.m. in our library. It is also a grief support group. If you are a caregiver or are grieving, we are here to encourage, comfort, and support.

The last two and a half years until this March saw me spending my days with my wife at Little Creek. Little Creek is Knoxville's premier nursing home. As Sandy approached death, I also spent my nights at Little Creek. As my wife's Parkinson's and dementia advanced, she lost the memories of our almost fifty-eight years together, but she never lost knowing me. On March 11 this year, God called my wife home.

Brothers and sisters, some of you will understand what I will say next. Others of you won't. But that doesn't mean you might not understand grief at some later point in your life.

When one suffers loss of a loved one, one becomes acutely aware of the value of that which was taken. Next to my salvation, Sandy was the most precious gift God had given me.

Grieving brings about a mishmash of emotions. It can bring about feelings of guilt. Or feelings of shame. Or the feelings due to all the “what ifs...” Some people I have been introduced to recently suffer losses due to circumstances that just aren’t talked about, such as the losses due to a miscarriage, or a drug overdose, or suicide. But people experiencing these types of losses grieve just like I grieve.

As do those who have experienced a sudden loss through an automobile accident or a natural disaster.

I have several friends who prayed for their wives healing fully expecting the Lord to honor their prayers, only to lose their spouses to cancer. These men became very angry with God. Even bitter. I’ve never experienced anger. Anger is not always common with those of us who grieve.

I knew my wife’s condition was terminal. God could’ve healed her, but I knew it was more likely He wouldn’t. Even though I thought I was prepared for her death, I wasn’t.

Brothers and sisters, all that you and I have and all that we are, come from God’s love of us.

Today’s Scripture lessons speak of two divine gifts: the gift of understanding, or wisdom, and the gift of love. In my years of caregiving and my final years of my vigil, I desperately needed and still need both these gifts. And I am certain of this, brothers and sisters, there are some of you listening to me this morning who, like me, also desperately need both these gifts.

Water is essential for life. We can live over forty days without food, but no longer than three or four days without water. Water also has spiritual significance. Water is used in cleansing. It symbolizes the washing away of our sins. Jesus was baptized in Jordan’s waters when the Holy Spirit descended upon him. We baptize with water. Wells play important roles in Biblical stories. Jesus offered the Samaritan women living water while she was at a well. Water is often a symbol of the Holy Spirit. We mix water with wine as we prepare the table for the Eucharist. This depicts the fact that water and blood flowed from Jesus’ side during his crucifixion,

Which is why I think of these two gifts, understanding and steadfast love, as two separate streams that flow together into a gentle river. They flow together into one sparkling waterway. Living our lives under the guidance of the Holy Spirit depends upon us dipping our cups into this river and allowing it to refresh and enliven our souls.

I. The Stream of Steadfast Love

Let’s look at the first stream that appears in this morning’s Old Testament lesson in 1 Kings 3:3-14. Verse 3 opens with, “Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father...” Because of this love, God appears to Solomon and states, “Ask what I shall give you.” Solomon begins his request in verse 6 with “You [God] have shown great and steadfast love to your servant.”

In the Hebrew, there are two words for love, but the most significant word for love is that which the *English Standard Version* translates as “steadfast love.” This word is *hesed*. It is this word which appears in both these passages. *Hesed* is the love that God has for His covenant people. It can also be translated as loving kindness, loyal love, and sometimes as mercy. It appears in the Old Testament 245 times in 239 verses. Not only does *The English Standard Version* translate *hesed* as “steadfast love,” It also translates it as “everlasting love.”

This Hebrew word is so rich, it is almost impossible to translate. It contains within it the concepts of favor, kindness, gentleness, loyalty, faithfulness, goodness, warm affection, and grace. These all describe the love that God has for us, His children. This love is not a cold, or a far-off love, but is a love that tenderly nurtures and is always present. Steadfast love. An enduring, never ending love.

The stork’s name in Hebrew means “kindness” and it was often seen by the Hebrews as the symbol of *hesed* because of the stork’s gentleness towards its young and its propensity to kill serpents. There also is a close link between the Hebrew word “stork” and “steadfast love” in that both share the same Hebrew root.

“Steadfast love” appears frequently in the Psalms. It is a recurring theme in the call and response of Psalm 136. Our psalm for this morning, Psalm 119:124, states, “Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love, / and teach me your statutes.”

Agape is the New Testament equivalent of *hesed*. Being Anglican, as our Rector, Father Jack would say, it’s obligatory for me to mention C. S. Lewis in my sermon. One of Lewis’s books goes into detail on *agape*, his book entitled *The Four Loves*. Our Friday men’s Bible group led by our brother David LaRose worked our way through this book not long ago. I invite any man who is interested in delving deeply into Biblical themes to join us at Panera Bread at Peter’s Road on Fridays at 7:00 a.m. We are currently studying the Gospel of John.

Agape and *hesed* both have at their core the desire to seek what is the ultimate good for the beloved. Rarely do I have the wisdom to know what someone’s ultimate good might be. I do know this. Neither *agape* nor *hesed* are sentimental, Pollyannish, or mushy types of love. Both are realistic. As Psalm 139 tells us, God knows our thoughts even before we think them.

Agape is one of the key words in our New Testament lesson, Romans 8:26-34, especially the last verses of this passage, verses 35 through 39.

It was God’s steadfast love that sustained me while I watched Sandy slowly drift away.

II. The Stream of Understanding, or Wisdom

1 Kings 3:7-9 records Solomon’s response to God:

⁷And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. ⁹Give your servant therefore an

understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"

Solomon was wise in knowing his need of understanding. He asked for wisdom out of his wisdom. It would be wise for all of us to ask for wisdom.

St. James tells us in verse 1:5 of his epistle: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." James also tells us in verses 3:13-18 that there is a difference between wisdom from above and wisdom that comes from the world. The wisdom from above is

first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Solomon recognizes his need and asks out of humbleness. He calls himself a "little child." The Hebrew for the word "understanding" has the idea of "hearing," of being open to advice, of evaluating that advice, especially from God, and of applying what is heard properly. "Understanding" is a synonym for wisdom.

This is my definition of wisdom as it appears in our Bibles: It is the proper application of the love of God and the love of neighbor in all the circumstances of our lives. As a caregiver, I especially needed wisdom in the decisions I had to make.

As a caregiver, I often was like a little child. I needed understanding and wisdom. I need this supernatural gift to know what I needed to do.

III. The Sunlit River of Wisdom and Love Is Ours to Dip into Whenever We Thirst

Sandy's brother has a cabin in Townsend where Sandy and I often spent quiet days. Sandy would go down to the river and just sit. She loved watching the tubers float down the river. This river reminds me of the river formed by the two streams that flow together, the stream of understanding and the stream of love. I picture sunlight sparkling on this river and I picture it inviting me to kneel and sip its cool and refreshing waters.

I'm going to switch metaphors. In this morning's gospel lesson, Matthew 13:31-33, Jesus uses the parable of the tiny mustard seed to illustrate that the Kingdom of God has been planted in our hearts, the hearts of us who believe. Two key values in our Kingdom ethic are love and wisdom. When we first receive Christ, these values are a single small seed. But if we cultivate this seed, it will grow into an immense bush.

Love needs cultivating. Wisdom needs cultivating. Both need tender care.

There is a caveat from the life of Solomon. Early on, he was wise in the ways of the Lord, but as time went on, he abandoned this wisdom for the wisdom of the world. But late in life, he recorded how empty the wisdom of the world is in Ecclesiastes. He returned to godly wisdom, but only after his life took an unfortunate turn away from God. As a caregiver, I often was like a little child. I needed understanding and wisdom.

IV. The Stream of Wisdom Is Sometimes Bone Dry in Comments to Those of Us Who Grieve

Fortunately, it is not bone dry in this parish. But that's not true with others who are outside our parish. Apostles is a church noted for its love.

People often mean well. With those of us who have suffered loss, words sometimes are helpful. At other times, they are harmful. I learned from a video on grief of one mother who lost her baby. One of her friends told her, "At least you won't have to change her diapers." This mother responded by saying, "I would give my right arm if I could be changing her diapers right now."

Learning of the loss of my wife, one neighbor told me, "You know, life goes on." I've heard from one well-meaning person, "Time heals all wounds." It doesn't.

And I've heard a verse taken out of context from our morning's New Testament lesson. Romans 8:28: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for the good..." Yet this verse is within the passage that tells us we often don't know how to pray. Or that we are praying for the wrong things or the wrong reasons. Listen to what Romans 8:25-27 tells us :

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Verse 28 follows immediately after Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us because we don't know how to pray. "And we know that that for those who love God, all things work together for the good..." Paul state this because the Spirit guarantees that we are always praying within the will of God. We sometimes don't know what that will is until it occurs. Did all things work out for Sandy and me? Yes, in one sense, but no in another, at least not yet. Not all is good for me right now. I grieve. I know when Jesus comes again, all my tears will be wiped away. But Jesus hasn't returned yet.

However, all is well with Sandy. Sandy's body is sleeping in a beautiful setting. According to Hebrews 12:23. her spirit is one of the spirits "of the righteous made perfect." Her spirit is under the custody and care of Jesus. Her body and spirit await the resurrection.

Yet she is no longer physically with me. I miss her. I miss her smile. I miss her laughter. I miss that whenever she was in a room, she brought sunshine into that room. I miss that she was so full of light and laughter.

Another thing not to say to those of us grieving is "don't cry." The book *The Grieving Brain* describes three types of tears. One type flushes dust from our eyes. The second type appears when we slice onions. But the third type differs radically from the other two: These are tears of sorrow. These tears contain chemicals in them that are like those in morphine, but not as intense. These chemicals soothe and comfort as we cry. God has created within us special tears that soothe our souls when we sorrow or grieve. So, don't say "don't cry." Instead, say, "Cry away."

What should we then say to those who are grieving? I often say, “May our Paraclete, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, be a palpable Presence while you walk through this difficult time.” But now, when I walk through a receiving line, I often say nothing. I simply hug the one grieving.

Caregivers often feel isolated. They rarely can come to church. Call them and ask them how they are. Send them cards. Bring them food. Just sit with the caregiver or the one who is grieving. With people who are grieving, encourage them to talk. Don’t comment. Just listen.

I will end with this story. I have a brother in Christ who is blue collar to the core. He owns a dry wall company. He hunts and fishes. He can be crude at times. But he and I were involved in intense discipleship sessions with men who mentored us in the faith. A few years ago, his wife succumbed to Alzheimer’s. Glenn said something that surprised me because it was not only wise, but sensitive. He said, “David, I don’t need people throwing bible verses at me. I know my Bible better than most. All I need is someone sitting alongside of me who is willing to cry along with me.”

Brothers and sisters, let us be those who will sit and cry alongside one another. This is the wise and loving thing to do,

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.