

LOVE IN A NEW LIGHT

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our creator who shows us love in a new light. Amen.

Normally, I'm someone who sees things in shades of gray rather than black and white. But there are certainly some issues that are simple either/or sorts of questions. One such issue is this: Either you believe in love at first sight, or you don't.

Frankly, I'm in the camp of non-believers. At least in terms of romantic relationships. There's just way too much involved in having a loving partnership with another person to base it solely off of that first look.

Maybe YOU DO believe in love at first sight, maybe you have one of those perfect love stories where you knew your partner was "the one" the first time you saw them. But I think you can still probably agree that your love changed and grew from that first moment, that it didn't just stay the way it was on that first day.

A few weeks ago, we heard stories of the first disciples being called by Jesus and how they dropped everything, leaving their businesses and everything they had ever known to follow him. Certainly that is a story of a kind of love at first sight. But the disciples' relationships with Jesus quickly deepened as they saw and experienced more things beyond that first impression.

Love is not just a one-time thing; it grows, it develops, there's a reason we talk about love *stories*, because in most cases, that's exactly what it is, a story of how two people came to develop a relationship between each other.

My wife Bekah and I were not a love at first sight sort of story. We knew each other when we were young and working at church camp together, and I think maybe there was a spark back then, but it was years after that until we started dating. And when we did start dating, I loved her, but there were all sorts of moments that developed and strengthened and built that love story.

One of those moments where I knew things had changed came a year after we started dating and I moved to Cumberland, Maryland for my pastoral internship. I didn't have a lot of stuff at the time, but enough that I needed a U-Haul, and a partner. My dad was several months into the beginning of what would eventually be diagnosed as Lou Gehrig's disease and had told me he would drive the truck but couldn't do any of the lifting.

And so it was Bekah that not only helped me with the heavy lifting, but kept me sane during the stress and anxiety of that move. And maybe it seems insignificant, but it was such a deeply romantic gesture; her helping me when no one else could. That moment led me to see our relationship in a new light. It changed the way I saw her completely. Suddenly I recognized all sorts of things in our past that had been similar selfless acts of love. It changed our story.

And isn't that what the disciples experienced on the mountaintop on the day of the Transfiguration with Jesus? Here they are with a man whom they love, they loved him from day one, but the relationship has deepened and grown and changed as their story has gone on. And right when they may have wondered, "could I possibly love my Lord any more?" Something happens, the man they love is changed before their eyes, they see Moses and Elijah, and they hear the voice of God. If there was any doubt in their minds as to who was this man they followed and love, it was answered, this is the beloved son of God.

And suddenly, they see every act of love leading up to that moment in a new light. Suddenly, the course of events in the next chapters of their love story are changed.

Love is not static. It morphs, it develops, it grows, it deepens. All of that change is part of the story of love.

Right around this time of year, three years ago, I was blessed for the time as a pastor with the invitation to visit a newborn baby with their mother and father in the maternity ward of Conemaugh Hospital. And I remember talking with this couple close to my own age, and the father telling me, “you know, I never thought I could love someone more than my wife, until I laid eyes on my daughter.”

You hear that sort of thing all the time, and frankly, I thought it was just something that people said, so I smiled and nodded. And then, four months later, MY daughter was born, and I understood. I discovered that I had more love to share than I could have possibly imagined. And seeing Bekah holding Annabelle for the first time, I saw our love for *each other* in a new light.

All through our lives, God gives us those sorts of mountaintop moments. Moments in which God shines a new light on the love that we thought we knew and understood. And suddenly things are different.

And believe me, this doesn't just happen for romantic relationships, it doesn't even just happen for familial relationships. Sometimes the light of God changes the way we love our neighbor.

I think that we've seen a lot of that love-changing light in the last twelve months, as the COVID pandemic has reminded us that we are all intimately linked through our communities. That being in community sometimes means prioritizing others' health and safety ahead of your own. That sometimes we need to inconvenience ourselves in order to love our neighbors.

You may have read or heard a quote sometime in the last year that's been falsely attributed to Dr. Tony Fauci, “I don't know how to explain to you that you should care for other people.” As Christians, we shouldn't need an explanation. We should know that we are called to love, not just our spouses, not just our family, but each and every one of our neighbors.

And we know that over time, our love changes. Over time we see people in new light. And that new light new changes how we think about the things we've seen in the past and it alters the course of our actions in the future. It changes our love story.

So let today be a mountaintop moment in your life. Allow today to change the way you see love, allow the beautiful light of God's love shown through Christ to alter the course of your love story, and change every step you take from here on out. Amen.