

Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You  No Matter What

February 24, 2022

A Note from Jon Esala

Dear Friends,

A few weeks ago, the Church Council gathered to ponder the coming year. Before we talked about any plans, Pastor April's spiritual director Anita led us in a time of reflection on our own journeys of faith. I was grateful for the chance to contemplate, and I gained some insight into my own story.



I noticed the thread of God's love at each station along my journey of faith, drawing me into the flow of grace.

When I was a child, God's love felt tangible to me, as though God were whispering to me that I was beloved.

As a teenager, I felt grace when I learned I didn't need to be perfect.

When I was in college, God's love called me to struggle with a faith that felt narrow and unloving to so many. As I separated from some communities I had long treasured, God's love was still present even if I doubted it was real.

Throughout my life, I've felt God's love whenever I'm in nature.

I sometimes feel ashamed of my past beliefs, words, and actions. I sometimes even mock my past self. I'm finding, however, that if I honor my journey honestly — both acknowledging the real reasons I moved on and remembering the gifts I received at each stage — that shame melts away. I'm left with grace and the path still in front of me.

I've been a part of this church for five years now, and I'm so grateful for this community. It's been a healing place for me. **I've felt freedom to be myself — someone still drawn to Jesus even if I don't have many answers.**

This year, I'm honored to serve as one of the lay leaders for the church. I hope I can be useful, and I trust that along the way I'll continue to find grace. God's mission has been going on long before us and will continue long after us. Yet, we are invited on the journey of experiencing and extending God's love.



In this year of encountering God through **The Great Story**, I find it helpful to remember that I'm not alone on my journey of faith, and many have gone before me.

Many of the stories we're covering are unsettling. I find that oddly comforting, though, because God shows up in the messiness of real human lives — joys, hopes, triumphs, fears, disappointments, and failures.

Perhaps if God's love showed up in the full human lives of the characters we see in these scriptures, we may find that God's love is ready to meet us in our full humanity.

Perhaps we may find that God's love is inviting us to participate in the flow of grace, too.

As we make decisions in the coming year about how we're going to use the additional space in Warehouse 839, engage in the many ongoing activities of this church, and consider how we emerge from the most acute phase of this pandemic, I hope we'll remember that all of it is grace. All of it is an invitation to participate in God's love filling us up and extending out.

Friends, I hope you encounter God's love precisely in the midst of your life.

I hope that love spills over into those you encounter.

I hope that together we make space for God's love to be made known without exception in this community.

I still believe God's love transforms lives — giving freely that which we so often think we need to earn.

Jon



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