

KIND OF LIKE THE KETCHUP INCIDENT

6th in a Series on the Character of God Called, "Indescribable"- Topic: God's Love
Ephesians 3:17-19

People of a certain age and those with underlying health conditions are still, after three long months of lockdown, supposed to continue living as though they have been sentenced to solitary confinement. But for how long? The usual answer is until there is a vaccine. That's not very encouraging. First, the usual time frame for developing a new vaccine that is both safe and effective against a disease is years. Despite all the hopeful talk, there is no guarantee that such a vaccine will actually arrive in less than a year. It's never been done before that quickly, so just on that basis the odds are not in our favor. But let's suppose that someone does come up with a vaccine before the end of the year. After all, never before has there been as much urgency and as massive an effort as is happening now. That brings us to a second problem. I am the farthest thing from an anti-vaxxer. But I still find myself just a little uneasy about a vaccine whose development has been *rushed*. Just watching television will give you pause because every other commercial on TV is an ad for some pharmaceutical product. It's like they are multiplying as fast as rabbits. And every one of them has a list of possible side effects that takes hours to recite and is truly disturbing. Yeah, uh, if you start to grow a third arm out of the top of your head you might want to report this to your physician. Unfortunately every medicine has some kind of unintended effect. So that might make us hesitant.

But how long do you want to live in solitary confinement? I admit I have been violating my parole. I actually ate a meal in a restaurant this past week, a first for me since I was sentenced to solitary. I actually got kicked out of the restaurant at first because I tried to enter it while not wearing a face mask. I had to go to my car, and get a mask; whereupon, I re-entered the restaurant, was shown to a table where I sat down and promptly removed my mask. Does this make any sense? The problem is no one has yet devised a mask that you can eat through. If you could invent such a thing I have no doubt it will be a big money maker. At least for the rest of this year.

The experience was a bit unsettling. They didn't have to worry about social distancing because there were so few people in the place. It's weird to be served by a person wearing a mask who does everything they can to literally avoid you like the plague. It makes you a little paranoid. Oh no, I touched the table! Quick, where's some hand sanitizer. After the restaurant I went to the bank. I was wearing a hat, sunglasses and a mask. In the past that would be more than a little suspicious, but I looked like every other customer. This has to be creating a problem for law enforcement. Good luck with that facial recognition software. My iPhone does not recognize my face when I have a mask on. It has looked at me and recognized me every day for almost a year, but boom, mask on and it says, "Who are you? I don't know you. I'm not going to unlock for you, stranger."

The whole mask thing is weird. But there is biblical precedent. There is a rumor that the Apostle Paul bought an early form of that protective equipment on the road to Damascus (de-MASC-us). Just kidding. Thinking about masks made me wonder about the plight of single people these days. How do you go about dating in the time of social distancing and face masks? Maybe it will subtly shift things in a deeper direction as appearance is less of a factor, since everyone's covering their face. One

thing I know for sure, the virus won't stop people from trying to find each other, because we humans have an insatiable need for love. Helen Fisher is a biological anthropologist who has studied this need for love. She has used MRI scans of people's brains, and she concludes that our brains treat love as a central need in the same class as hunger and thirst. We crave it that desperately. We need it for survival. The social distancing/mask endeavor is a trial for us because it separates us from each other. It takes away a part of what it means to be human. And that part has to do with love.

But what is love? How can we find it? It turns out that a crucial and foundational truth having to do with love is revealed as we study the character of God. That truth is the most freeing, powerful, transforming thing we will ever encounter. Let's look today at Ephesians 3:17-19 and learn about this.

PREMISE: GOD IS LOVE

The most succinct statement about love as an aspect of God's character is 1 John 4:8. "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." Some people try to turn that around to mean that love is God. But that's not correct. God is a person. He is *more* than just love. He is good, wise, holy and just. Love is not all there is to define or describe God. But God is the ultimate definition of love. He is the epitome and embodiment of it. He is also the source of it. Whenever we have experienced a taste of love, we have experienced a tiny bit of who God is, because that good thing has come from him.

Love pervades everything that God does. He never does anything that is unloving. Psalm 136 is an antiphonal song. Picture two groups singing this song back and forth to each other. One group sings a line, then the other answers with a response. Only the second group has a pretty easy time learning the song, because their line is the same every time. It starts, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good." That's the first group singing. The second group answers, "His love endures forever." The first group sings, "Give thanks to the God of gods." The answer is "His love endures forever." The psalm goes on about how God does great wonders, created the stars in the sky, brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt and divided the Red Sea. In verse 23 it says, "He remembered us in our low estate." Let me guess. The response is, "his love endures forever." Hey, how did you know?

What was behind everything God has done in history beginning with creation itself, right up to the present day? It was all motivated by his unfailing, loyal love. His love endures forever. It is always there.

What is love? Our culture is confused about that. Part of the problem is we only have one word for love. We use the word love to represent a lot of different things. It is used in a wide variety of relationships. I love my wife, I love my kids and grandkids, I love my mother, I love my brother, I love my friends, I love sports, I love doughnuts, I love Mexican food. But the relationships I have with those are not at all the same. Love gets confused with affection, good feelings, lust, desire, appreciation, and other ideas. But how does God define love? What do we know about God's love?

Love, at its core, is other-centered. It is dedication to a person, to seeking that person's good, whatever the cost. That is the basic idea. But there's a great deal more we need to know about God's love.

GOD'S LOVE IS UNPROVOKED

You've heard before, probably many times, that the ancient Greek language was more precise than English when it comes to love. It had different words for different love relationships. It had one for family relationships, one for romantic or erotic relationships, one for friendships. But there was one that was not prominent and had no especially positive connotations, until the New Testament writers picked it up and elevated it. It was the word *agape*. When John wrote that God is love, this is the word he used. When Paul wrote of God's love in Ephesians 3:17-19, this is the word he used.

Most human love is conditional. It is earned or deserved. We love a person because of something. It is because of some endearing quality we see in that person, something we find appealing in them, or because of the fact that they love *us* and shower us with kindness. It is conditional because if that something we find appealing somehow fades or no longer seems so endearing, or if they fail to treat us the way we want, our "love" might fade or disappear altogether. In the past four decades I have officiated at a lot of weddings. I do not recall one in which the bride and groom were not ecstatic to be there. They were never indifferent toward each other. Every one of them, without fail, were eager, joyful, thrilled to be united together. They were rapturously in love with the person they were marrying. So that must mean none of those couples has ever gotten divorced, right? I wish. There have been a number of those marriages that have failed. I'm happy to report that the percentage is low, but it is not zero.

I recall those happy, excited couples, and wonder how a few of them got from that place to being so distant from each other, so angry at each other that they could no longer tolerate living together. Somehow they loved a person because of something and that something changed, so they could no longer love that person.

We are so programmed to think this is how love really is, that we have a hard time believing it could be anything else. We are astounded by the rare examples we see where some person loved another human being who was unloving toward them and unlovely. And we tend to think that God loves the way we "love." So we have trouble believing he could ever love us. We see the unlovely parts of our own inner character, we see our weaknesses and failings, and are sure he could not possibly love us. If we can get to the place where we accept that he might love us, we worry that we are going to do something, say something or be something that will cause him to stop loving us. In effect, we fear he's going to get fed up and divorce us.

Writer Mark Buchanan says, "agape love is stubborn. It is loving even in the face of resistance. Even in the face of rejection or evil. Agape is unprovoked love." In his book, *God As He Longs For You To See Him*, Chip Ingram wrote, "We don't provoke, trick, convince, earn or win God's love. He doesn't love us because of who we are but because of who he is." That kind of love is intrinsically part of

God's character. He loves because it is his nature to love, not because it is our nature to be lovable. I was watching some birds in our yard. I started thinking about why birds decide to fly. A young bird doesn't look around and suddenly notice these appendages attached to its body. "Hey, they are kind of an interesting shape. I wonder what I could do with them." Then he sees other creatures flapping similar appendages and somehow using them to actually defeat gravity. "I wonder if I could do that?" Birds fly because it is part of their nature. It is natural for them to do so. And that is why God loves. He doesn't love because to know us is to love us; he doesn't love us because of something in us, because we deserve love. He loves because it is who he is. It is his nature to always love.

GOD'S LOVE IS RELENTLESS

Combine that aspect of God's unprovoked love with another part of his character, which is that he is unchanging. That means it always has been his nature to love; it is his nature right now, and it always will be his nature. He will never change. So God is relentless in loving people. He never stops. He never wavers, he never weakens and he never gives up. At every moment of our lives he loves us, because that is who he is.

There are a couple of things about God's love that we should notice in Ephesians 3:18-19. The first is that Paul prayed that we would be able to grasp "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." He wanted us to get that God's love extends in every direction. It is wide, long, high and deep. That's an interesting picture. Imagine a 3D graph. It would have x, y and z axes. Paul was saying the love of God extends out in every axis. No matter which way you go, the love of God is there. It is east and west, north and south, up and down. It seems like Paul is describing four dimensions; wide, long, high and deep. I think high and deep stand for up and down. So God's love extends to all points of the compass and up and down as far as is possible.

The second thing to note about God's love is how vast it is. Literally Paul calls it the "surpassing knowledge love of Christ." The words "surpassing knowledge" form an adjective that describes the love of Christ. It is a love that surpasses knowledge. The word "surpassing" is a picture word. It is *hyperballousan*. The first part is a preposition that is familiar to us. It is "hyper," meaning way more. "That child is not just active, she is hyperactive. Way, way more than active."

The root of the second part of the word is also familiar to English speakers. It is the verb *ballo*. Notice it contains the word "ball." What do you do with a ball? Yes, I know, if you're a soccer player you kick it, but let's ask, what is one of the things that separates us from lower animals? It is opposable thumbs that allow us to use our hands so we can grip things, and throw them. Things like a ball, for instance. One massive dictionary I looked at traced back the English word "ball" to this Greek verb. That's what the verb meant. It meant to throw, implying that is what you do with a ball.

When you put it all together this participle means "Throwing super far beyond." Not just throwing beyond, but hyper beyond. One time when Ella was only about three, rather than the mature four-year old she is now, we were out in the backyard and were playing with a ball. I was a few feet away from her and said, "Throw the ball to me, Ella." With a kid that age this is always a bit dangerous. They

aren't real coordinated when it comes to throwing and they have no sense of how much force to put into a throw, so you always run the risk the little one is going to fire a blazing fastball right at your nose. But this was a rubber type ball so I knew even in the worst case it wasn't going to do much damage. Ella reared back and fired the ball. There was good news. First, she didn't peg me right in the face, and second, she displayed remarkable arm strength. The bad news is she flung that thing way over my head. It would have sailed out of the yard except it hit a tall bush. She threw it super far beyond me. That's the picture of this word.

In other words, it is ridiculously more than is needed. As I was studying this passage an incident from my past came to mind. I love ketchup. I always want lots of ketchup on a hamburger, which is unfortunate because it means I will invariably end up with ketchup in many places I don't want it, especially on my clothes. One time I was in a restaurant and wanted to put ketchup on my burger, but the ketchup was shy. It wanted to stay out of sight in its bottle. You know where this is going to go. I was not going to give up on ketchup. I shook the bottle, I hit it to encourage the sauce to come out into the light of day. I did that repeatedly. Finally I won. It came out. Oh boy, did it come out. It didn't just trickle or ooze out. It exploded out of the bottle. Suddenly on my plate there was a veritable tsunami of ketchup. Um, Rick, do you want any hamburger with that ketchup? I had so much ketchup I could have supplied the entire restaurant with it. I could have gone around to other tables asking, "Do you need any ketchup? I have an awful lot here and I'd be happy to share some with you." Envision that ocean of ketchup all over my plate. That's a bit like what Paul is picturing with God's love. It is a tsunami of love. It is hyper-beyond any ability we have to even understand how vast, how endless it is. It goes hyper-beyond comprehension. It is infinitely greater than we could ever imagine.

How vast is God's love? Romans 5:8 says, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." There's the obstacle. We were still sinners. As Buchanan said, we were resisting, we were rejecting, we were choosing evil, but that could not stop God from loving us. We measure love by cost. You can tell how much one person loves another by what they are willing to sacrifice for the one loved. Have you ever noticed the cost of engagement and wedding rings, for instance? I'm really glad I'm not a young guy wanting to ask the love of his life to marry him right now. The rings are hideously expensive. Why is that? It is a way for a woman to know that the man really does love her. So often he's a young guy struggling to make ends meet, and buying a ring like that is a painful financial sacrifice. It tells her he loves her that much. (My wedding ring cost \$35. I wonder what that says?)

There is no way to measure what it cost God to love us. 36 years ago today was by far the worst day of Laurie's and my lives. On June 21, 1984 our little son, Joel, went home to be with Jesus. He spent 40% of his brief life in the Neonatal ICU and had multiple surgeries. Then he died, and Laurie and I were crushed. I can't get closer to telling you how painful, how awful that loss was. There is no scale that adequately measures that grief. I want you to grasp that God loved his Son infinitely more than we loved ours. On this Father's Day, remember that he was a Father who loves perfectly, and he purposely chose to give up his son, to let him suffer and die, in order to rescue us, to love us. That is

the measure of his love. There is no human calculus that can measure that love. It is too vast for us to even get close to comprehending. It really does hyper-surpass knowledge.

If God loves that massively, that relentlessly, doesn't that mean nothing can stop him from loving us, and that therefore he would never judge or condemn anyone? Some people interpret God's unprovoked love to mean that he will never judge anyone. Former megachurch pastor and author Rob Bell parted ways with biblical Christianity when he decided that love and justice were incompatible and that God would not judge people in the end.

God's love is not spineless, squishy, a sort of amoeba-like blob that actually stands for nothing. God, because he loves, stands for good, and opposes evil. He must do so, to be good. He must do so in order to truly love us. If we don't stand against evil in a person's life, we don't actually love them. Neither would God if he didn't stand against evil.

Not long ago our four-year-old granddaughter, Ella, experienced a serious judgment from her parents. One day she was riding her bicycle and rode it into the street without looking, right in front of a moving car. Fortunately the driver was alert and stopped. Had he not been, she could have been seriously injured or killed. Her parents confronted her. They judged her. She got some painful consequences for that one. That's because her parents *love* her, meaning they want what's good for her and will go to great lengths to stop her from making destructive choices like that one.

Because God is love he always does what is for our good. And if we insist on rejecting him, choosing evil, which will damage us and other people, then he will do what is for our good, which is to judge us. To do anything else would be unloving.

GOD'S LOVE IS PERSONAL

There are over seven billion people on the planet today. Does God love all of them? Yes, he does. God so loved *the world*, everyone in it, so much that he sent his one and only son into the world to save them. But if he loves everyone, doesn't that mean that he kind of loves us en masse? He loves the human race, sure, but does he even notice me?

Sometimes we have difficulty accepting the idea that God could actually loves us personally. Unfortunately, that doesn't help me much if God loves everybody, but he doesn't really love me individually. Laurie and I often use videos on line to guide us in exercise. There are three couples who have a lot of exercise programs we like to follow. I've noticed a couple of times at the end of a session one of them might say something like, "Hey, thank you guys for joining us. We love you." Every time I hear that I think, "You don't love me. You have no idea of who I am. How could you love me?" Is that how it is with God? Does he say, "Hey, thanks for listening. I love all you humans..." ?

Notice Galatians 2:20. It is a familiar verse. Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Those are powerful words, but I particularly want you to

notice that last sentence. I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved *me* and gave himself *for me*! Paul knew that Jesus loved him personally, individually. Jesus gave himself to die for Paul personally. That is also true of you and me. God loves you individually, personally.

Psalm 139:13-14 says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." In verse 15 David said, "My frame was not hidden from you." In verse 16 he wrote, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." God knew you before you were ever born. He has loved you since before the creation of the world.

Do you remember the good old days when we used to have sports events? Remember when they would have these games at stadiums and people actually used to pack into those stadiums by the thousands to watch those games, and they'd all be sitting right next to each other? And no one even wore face masks! Ah, those were the days. I actually went to a few of those games back in the day. But I remember going to the Rose Bowl game on New Year's Day several times. There were over 90,000 people in that stadium. They were all there with their individual lives, thinking they were kind of the center of all things, and I didn't know anything about any of them. All I knew was they were all kind of in my way making my life more complicated. There's simply no way a human being can know anything about 90,000 different individuals. But God can and does.

How is that possible? Listen to Jesus in Luke 12:6-7. "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Jesus used sparrows as an example because sparrows are so common and plentiful. How much would you pay to buy a sparrow or two? That would be zero dollars. We've got lots of them around our yard. I can't tell one from another. They don't matter. But God is infinite. That means he has the ability to track every single one of them, and he does. And it means he can easily keep track of and care about every single human being. And he does. He knows you. He cares about you. He loves you, individually.

GOD'S LOVE IS SYMPATHETIC

In his book, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer wrote that sympathizing with a person is "the test of whether love is genuine or not. If a father continues cheerful and carefree while his son is getting into trouble, or if a husband remains unmoved when his wife is in distress, we wonder at once how much love there can be in their relationship." That's so true. That's what love does to you. You feel for one you love. When they hurt, you hurt.

Amazingly God loves the same way. Hebrews 4:15 says, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet he did not sin." He sympathizes with us. Did you hear that?

We know that Jesus came to die for us. But have you ever thought about the fact that he went through being a baby, growing up as a kid, being a teenager? We know that part of his coming here was to

show us what God is like, to show us how to live and to teach us. But what about all those years before he began his public ministry? We know almost nothing about all that time, and it was most of his life!

Why did he have to go through all of that? I think it is in part because he had to get a full dose of human life. He experienced it all. He wants us to know he has gone through everything that we have to go through. He's been sick, tired, hurt, teased and taunted, frustrated by the failures and unfairness of others, misunderstood. He's been treated unfairly, oppressed, betrayed and rejected. He's felt the sting of the meanness of others and the temptation to lash out at them in anger. Jesus knows what it feels like, and he feels sympathetic for us in our hurts, our failures, our disappointments.

You all know I madly love my wife. There are so many reasons. There is one I've never mentioned before that not too long ago I experienced again. Laurie and I had ordered some food from a Mexican restaurant. But Laurie had failed to make one special stipulation when she ordered. That stipulation was one that I make with religious devotion – No cilantro. I watched her as she carefully looked through her taco and tried to pick out every bit of cilantro she could find. We had a discussion of cilantro at a family get-together. In our own family there are people who like it. Toby can't tell any difference, so they mostly see my cilantro phobia as a weird quirk. But my wife has come to experience the horror of cilantro. She's not quite as extreme as me, but she does not like it. It is such a relief to have someone who understands, who sympathizes with my cilantro problem, who feels like I do. It makes me love her all the more. What we need to understand is that Jesus feels for us, he understands, he loves us with sympathy! I'm pretty sure, given that he is holy, that he also has a problem with cilantro...

GOD'S LOVE IS TRANSFORMATIVE

Love is powerful. It changes people. In the middle of verse 19 there is an important word. It is the word, "that." The Greek word really meant, "in order that," and it introduced a purpose clause. Paul had just prayed that we would know or experience God's love that goes way beyond knowing. Then he tells us why he prays that. He said it is in order that we might "be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Think about that for a moment. What is the fullness of God? The fullness of God is all that he is. We have just seen he is perfectly loving. We have seen that he is good, wise and holy. Hebrews 13:20 says he is the God of peace. He doesn't need anything to be perfectly at peace. In John 15:11 Jesus talked about his joy. In 2 Corinthians 1:3 it says he is the God of all comfort. Romans 15:13 says he is the God of hope. Acts 3:15 says he is the author of life. The fullness of God is all of these things and more. It is his love, peace, joy, wisdom, goodness, holiness, power, comfort, hope, and life. Paul says the goal here is for us to be filled up to that fullness with those same things, with all that he is, with all of his love, peace, joy, wisdom, goodness, power, life – and all the rest.

How is that possible? I can't be God, nor can you. No we can't, but think of it this way. Think of the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. It is massive beyond our ability to comprehend. At some points it is more than 35,000 feet deep. It is estimated that it contains 187 quintillion gallons of water. Now

imagine that you try to pour all of that water into an eight-ounce glass. Is it going to fit? Absolutely not. But here's the question: do you suppose it will fill the glass? Are you kidding? It would be totally full. It would be filled way beyond overflowing with sea water.

You can't pour all the fullness of God into us. But God wants to try. Though it won't all fit, it will fill *us* totally to the point where it spills all over the place around us. God wants his fullness, his goodness, holiness, love, joy, peace, strength, hope and life pouring into us, filling us up beyond full. And according to Paul the way that happens is for us to know the love of God that goes hyper-beyond knowing. The more rooted we are in God's love for us, the more confident of it we are, the more aware of it we are, the more we depend on it, the more we will experience the fullness of God. The more we experience that fullness, the more we will be transformed into a totally different kind of people, people who live a lot like Jesus.

Our ability to live with the fullness of God, to live a Christian life of joy, peace, love and power will be determined by how rooted we are in God's love, by how much the reality of it fills our hearts each and every day.

CONCLUSION

REST AND REJOICE IN GOD'S LOVE

There is a powerful statement in 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear." Do you remember what it was like when you first started dating that certain someone? Remember how badly you wanted to look your best, and wished you looked better than your best, and how you wanted to be on your best and most charming behavior? Do you remember the nervousness, fearing you were going to somehow blow it and this wonderful person would want nothing more to do with you as a result? Do you remember wanting to impress this amazing person to convince them to like you? The threat of rejection, of failure to capture this person's heart and approval, was heavy.

Not long ago Laurie and I were having breakfast. We were eating oatmeal that morning. My first spoonful of oatmeal I actually got some of it in my mouth, but not all of it. Somehow, and I don't even know how it happened, some of it dropped off my spoon right onto my shirt. I had a nice little streak of oatmeal down the front of my shirt. I wish this were an aberration, but it's not. This kind of thing happens all too often. I have said to Laurie that it's like I have my own little, unique eating disorder. I seem to have trouble actually getting food into my mouth instead of on my clothes. Had that happened when we were first getting to know each other it would have been mortifying. I would have thought, "Oh, great. She's going to think I'm like a pathetic little twit who can't even feed himself without get his food all over himself." I would have feared she would have been turned off and thought, "I for sure can do better than this. I know there's a guy out there who can at least feed himself without making a mess." When that recent event happened Laurie didn't even flinch. ...I guess because she's seen it so often before. But the cool thing is that though I was frustrated by yet

another gastronomic failure, I didn't have even a hint of concern about our relationship. *I know she loves me, and because of that I don't fear she will reject me.* I am a little concerned that she might tease me mercilessly, but she will still love me. Perfect love, real love, complete love, takes fear right out of the equation. *Perfect love is the source of freedom, security, peace and joy.*

That's how our relationship with God should be. His love for us is perfect, and it takes fear totally out of the picture. You don't need to fret because you are imperfect, fallen, failing, weak. God knows all about it. When you do the spiritual equivalent of dropping your food on your shirt it changes nothing. God still loves you. That is why Jesus said we can find rest for our souls in him. For there we are totally loved.

We should rejoice in that. And we must never forget that our ability to live the Christian life, to be at peace, to rejoice in God, to have hope, to experience his power, to pass on his love to other people, will be measured and defined by how confident and secure we are in God's love. His love is the engine and the motivation behind everything we do. It is the very ground of who we are in Christ.

LOVE, BECAUSE HE IS LOVE

If we are really being filled up to the fullness of God, then what is going to be primary about us? What will be our motivation in all we do? It will be the same as his. His motivation in everything is to love. And that should also be true of us.

In John 13:34-35 Jesus said this is how people will know that we are his disciples: we will love one another. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 Paul said that whatever we do, no matter how impressive it is, if we do it without love, then we are nothing. Love determines everything we do.

About a year ago I was at an event where there were a lot of people from my past. I noticed one person in particular who years ago had done some harm to me. This person, among other things, had said some untrue and hurtful things both to me and about me. I hadn't seen him since. There was a bit of thought for a moment that what I would like to do is give that person the old Bronx cheer. I knew I wouldn't do that, but I felt a strong urge to just make sure to steer clear of the person, just not deal with him. I didn't have to snub him or anything like that. There were lots of people there and there was no need for me to do anything other than just not make an effort to seek him out. But I knew very well what God wanted me to do. He filled me with his fullness, which meant he poured into me the awareness that I needed to love the person. Love is always the right thing to do. Let me repeat that. ***Love is always the right thing to do. Always.*** I didn't *feel* especially loving. I didn't feel affection for the guy. Like I said, I *felt* like I'd prefer to just avoid him. I also thought it possible that he might not be pleased to see me. But love drives out fear. I knew what God wanted. So when I had the chance I found him and greeted him with all the warmth that I could generate. I tried to be loving to him. The heavens didn't open. There was no big moment. But it was clear that he was very happy that we could still have a relationship in Christ, that we could still greet and love each other. *Because God is love, love is always the right thing to do.*