

Swimming in the Rain

Colossians 3:12-17

(An image of the new life in Christ is to sing with grace in our hearts.)

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Trickle, trickle, drip drop, splish splash, plip plop! When John the Baptist poured water on Jesus' head to baptize him, it must have felt good. At that moment, we are told, Jesus felt very loved. Jesus *knew* God loved him. Jesus *felt* God loved him.

Trickle, trickle, drip drop, splish, splash, plip plop! With an umbrella in his hand, Gene Kelly sang and danced: "I'm singing in the rain, just singing in the rain, what a glorious feeling, I'm happy again. I'm laughing at clouds so dark up above. The sun's in my heart and I'm ready for love...just singing, singing in the rain."

Jesus *knew* and *felt* that God loved him, as baptismal water flowed over him. Gene Kelly *felt* very lovable as he danced in the rain.

This letter to the people of Colossae includes a number of imperatives: Those who were Christian were to be kind, humble, patient, and able to forgive. In the midst of this description of what they should be like, there is an image that to me is absolutely beautiful, "Sing with grace in your hearts." This wonderful image is a description of what new life in Christ would be like. We would "Sing with grace in our hearts."

Some people *know* with their head that God loves them, and they *feel* it, too. They know that God's unconditional love surrounds them, and they radiate that love most of the time—almost visibly singing with that grace from their hearts.

Others need only a slight *reminder* that God loves them and they *feel* that love in their hearts.

But sometimes God's grace gets stuck in our heads. We may grow up *KNOWING* God loves us, or we may never have really known that. In either case, for some reason we don't really *feel* loved, unconditionally. We somehow don't *feel* we're a precious child of God.

Gene Kelly did not sing, "I'm singing in the rain, just singing in the rain, what glorious THOUGHTS, I'm thinking of being happy again." He sang, "What a glorious *feeling*; I'm happy again."

How can we regain or gain that feeling of a song in our heart, if God's love is stuck up here in our head?

One possibility is to remember our baptisms. *Remembering* that we are loved by God unconditionally and remembering the people who loved us when we were baptized can sometimes help us to *feel* that grace that is still with us.

Sometimes *a surprise event* will jar loose God's love from our head, so that love makes its way to our heart, so we really feel loved.

Almost all of us can recall either when we learned to float or we remember helping a child to learn to float. The little one is in the water, holding on to us. We say, "I'm here, I won't let go of you." "Relax." Then we say, "I'll let go just a tiny bit, but I'm right here." All the while the water bears the child up; yet, paradoxically, the child needs to *let* themselves be born up by the water. The child gradually learns to transfer trust in you to trust in the power of the water to support.

Maybe that's part of the challenge we face as we accept God's acceptance. It's a gradual process to learn to trust God's buoyant support and love.

In the summer time in the Mid-West, people in community swimming pools usually hate the rain, for when it's coming, announced by thunder and lightening, the lifeguards blow their whistles and scream, "Everybody out, everybody out, for twenty minutes, starting now." Unfortunately, in 17 minutes there's usually another sound of thunder, and it's another 20 minutes till you're allowed back into the water.

However, in Southern California, we seldom have lightning, so rain is not so often a deterrent to swimming. Here in Redlands I swim in the Drayson Center pool in Loma Linda, and a couple months ago on one of those rainy days, I had a beautiful experience swimming in the rain there. It is fascinating to swim the crawl on top of the water and to simultaneously feel rain falling on our backs. It's a different matter, if we turn over to swim the back stroke, for rain then falls on our face!

I started this illustration to state that sometimes a surprise event can lead us to the spiritual experience of deeply feeling God's love. That unusual experience of swimming was one such experience for me. With water bearing me up from below as water also fell from above, for me in that moment, there was NO ESCAPING the sacrament of water. How could God's love stay stuck in my head? I felt it. Water bearing up; water raining down. A sacred moment, no escaping God's love.

The author of Colossians provided an image: singing with Christ's love in our hearts, or singing with grace in our hearts; I'm calling that feeling loved. Gene Kelly gave us the image of singing in the rain—happy again, feeling lovable. *Swimming* in the rain is an *image* that presents this double truth: **God bears us up and rains down upon us.** We can't escape God's love.

This can easily seem like just religious talk; however, it makes a big difference in our lives. This love-stuff felt in our hearts is very practical for daily life.

A professor at seminary told me about this decades ago. I was substitute teaching one year to make my way through seminary. At the beginning of the year, I was subbing for two weeks in a business machines class, something I knew nothing about. Because it was the beginning of the semester, I had to fill in the attendance book. Near the end of the two weeks the recovering teacher came in while I was still there, after school, looked at the attendance book and screamed at me for doing it all wrong. I burst into tears. I was no shorter than I am now, but immediately I felt 2 inches tall. I told my seminary professor about this, and he said that in that moment I did not feel loved. I thought my professor was sort of "pie-in-the-sky" with that remark. I said, "Of course I felt loved—by my sister, my parents, by ..." He said, "No, at that moment, the fact that the teacher's comments could make you feel so small, unappreciated, shows that you did not *feel loved* by God—at that moment."

I have thought of that professor's comments over and over in many circumstances in my life, and I've debated it in my head. This week, as I mulled over and over the image in Colossians, to "sing with grace in our hearts" the professor's observation finally made more sense.

Let's see how it would work with a hypothetical situation. Let's imagine a very good police officer meeting up with an excellent professor. Let us imagine that this professor and this police officer encounter each other in an awkward situation—a situation that creates conflict for them. Just like me with the Business machines teacher, it

would be so easy, so typical, for either of these professionals to get angry with the other and for the either one to feel unappreciated. Actually, both could get angry and both could feel unappreciated at the same time. We could hardly blame either one for either response—the vast majority of human being reacts to conflict of some kind with anger and a sense of diminishment.

I found myself wondering what it would be like if a professor and a police officer each were “singing with grace in their hearts,” or *feeling* loved and lovable. Just imagine that at the *exact moment* that the two wonderful professionals realize that there is a mistake, a conflict, and each finds themselves somewhat perplexed, each of them *feels* loved. Each *feels in their heart God’s love both bearing them up and raining down upon them*. What might happen? They might actually laugh—“Gee, what an odd situation this is.” Or, they might, *feeling* loved themselves, grasp how difficult it might be for the *other* person. The police officer might say, “What a difficult moment this is for YOU.” Or, maybe it’s the professor who would say, “I realize this is awkward for YOU.” Then, they might actually shake hands and bid each other well.

I do not consider the image, *to sing with God’s grace in our heart*, that is, to *feel* deeply that we are loved, to be a *rule* that we should obey. I think of it as a *gift* that we can accept. It makes our lives easier. Love just does that. Feeling loved is a gift.

How many times are you and I like the wonderful professor or the excellent police officer? How many conflicts do we have—at home, at work, on the highway, at stores? Little conflicts? Big ones? How often do we suddenly feel under-appreciated or angry? Was my seminary professor correct, years ago? Do we at that moment of conflict, when we either feel small or angry, lose touch with the fact that we are loved?

This week I’ve realized what the professor meant, finally! Realized it deep inside. I’ve grasped that if, at the moment the Business Machines teacher screamed at me for preparing the attendance book wrong, I would have felt loved, if I were swimming in the rain, feeling love from below and above—that is, in touch with my livableness, then I might have said, “Oh, sir, I sure did my best, but then you are so experienced, how do you set up the attendance record?” I thought further. What if the teacher, who had been ill and no doubt was frustrated with not being there to start the semester, had felt lovable, felt loved. He just might have some in, noted the book, and said, “I regret I wasn’t here to set this up for you. Thanks for doing the best you could, but I don’t like it this way. Do you want me to teach you how I think it works better?”

It makes a very very big *practical difference* in our lives if we feel, especially when we need it badly, *God bearing us up and at the same time raining down upon us*.

That had been the end of my sermon, but yesterday I reread the beginning of this passage again, the part where it says to be kind, humble, patient, and forgiving. Whoa! Now I see that those behaviors are actually the **consequence** of our feeling loved in our hearts. When we’re feeling small, it’s hard to be kind. When we’re singing with grace in our hearts, we don’t think a thing about it, we just are kind.

As we sing now, “Rain Down Your love on Your people,” may any *knowledge* of God’s love that’s stuck in our heads trickle down so you *feel* loved, in our hearts.