

Jesus Loves Me

Romans 8:31-39

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Let us pray: *Good and kind God, full of grace, break the bread of your Word among us and nourish us with your truth. In the name of Christ Jesus we pray. Amen*

Karl Barth was a German Christian who belongs on the short list of the most illustrious theologians in the history of Christianity.

Barth dominated the theology of the 20th century, and because of his work the course of modern theology changed directions.

In 1962, six years before his death, Barth made his only visit to the United States. One night he lectured at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. After the lecture he met with students and faculty in the coffee shop for some informal discussion. In that discussion someone asked him if there was any way he could summarize his vast theological findings into a few simple statements. A student queried: "What, in your judgment, is the essence of the Christian faith?" No doubt those present waited for profound, intellectual insights from this theological giant. Barth thought for a moment and then smiled, **"Yes, I can summarize my understanding of the Christian faith. In the words of a**

song my mother used to sing to me, 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"

It was an absolutely overwhelming moment for his hearers. There sat the greatest theologian of the age expressing his final conclusion in the words most of us learned on our mother's lap. I believe Barth was right. At the heart of the Christian gospel is the simple affirmation, "Jesus loves me!". Having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is the most important truth that I could share with you today. And the little song which we will sing following the sermon captures the essence of what the ministry of Valley Presbyterian Church, is all about

"Jesus Loves Me" is a song loved the world over, in every language. Yet, it is so simple that its message may actually be overlooked.

Jesus loves me, this I know.

Stated even more simply, "*I know Jesus loves me.*" One of the foremost of human needs is to know that we are loved. To hear the words "I love you" from a parent, a spouse or a friend seems to chase away self-doubt, loneliness, or even despair. To be assured

that we are loved covers our failures and leads us to self-acceptance. To be loved "warts and all" is a blessing. And how much more a gift to be loved by Jesus Christ. We are assured of the love of Jesus. As Paul tells us in the Scripture passage from Romans, Chapter 8: **there is nothing that can separate us from God's love. Not life or death or the powers of darkness, or our fears of today or our worries of tomorrow; nothing can separate us from Jesus,** when we come to him seeking forgiveness and life. Of that love, we can be sure.

All through his life Jesus was saying to people, "I love you." He healed the sick, fed the multitudes, touched the untouchable, loved the unlovely and the unloved; and still, when he was flogged and nailed to the cross, he prayed, "**Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing.**" Even as he was dying on the cross, he said in essence: "Nothing you can do, nothing in the entire world will stop my loving you." Of that love we can be sure.

For the Bible tells me so.

The Bible does not attempt to prove God's existence. Rather, it's pages are filled with the affirmation of God's gracious, merciful and holy ways with humankind.

To the question posed to a Christian: "How can you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God loves you?", the simplest, clearest response is, "*Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.*" That may seem too simplistic to our twenty-first century minds, as we sit in the comfort and relative safety of the sanctuary on a Sunday morning. But, believe me, in the midst of a crisis of self-identity and self-worth, or in a doctor's office, or the emergency room, or with a dying loved-one in our arms, or at a memorial service --- the simplest and clearest assurance is sometimes all that we can grasp.

The Bible is the written revelation of God. It was not found somewhere under a rock in God's handwriting. Real flesh and blood people, like David and Moses and Job, Matthew, Mark, Paul and the other biblical writers were inspired by God to write down the truths about life and eternity. Through the centuries of translations, commentaries, scholastic research and debates, the Bible still brings the simple, clear message to you and to me, "*Jesus loves.*" Of that love we can be sure.

Little ones to him belong.

Keith Miller tells of an out-going forty-year-old woman who was part of a sharing group he led. This is her story.

"When I was a tiny little girl, my parents died and I was put in an orphanage. I was not pretty at all and no one seemed to want me, but I longed to be adopted and loved by a family as far back as I can remember. I thought about it day and night, but everything I did seemed to go wrong. I must have tried too hard to please the people who came to look me over, and what I did was to drive them away. One day the head of the orphanage told me that a family was coming to take me home with them. I was so excited that I jumped up and down and cried! The matron reminded me that I was on trial and that this might not be a permanent arrangement, but I just knew that it would be. So I went with this family and started school. I was the happiest little girl you can imagine and life began to open for me just a little. Then one day a few months later I skipped home from school and ran through the front door of the big old house we lived in. No one was at home, but there in the middle of the front hall was my battered old suitcase with my little coat thrown across it. As I stood there and looked at my suitcase, it slowly dawned on me what it meant. I did not belong here anymore."

Miller said that when the woman stopped speaking there were no dry eyes in the group. But then the woman cleared her throat and said almost matter-of-factly, "This happened to me seven times before I was thirteen years old, but wait, don't cry. It was

experiences like these that ultimately brought me to God. When I was having so much trouble finding a sense of belonging from other human beings, I was driven to God, and there found what I had always longed for -- a safe place----with God.

Have you ever felt as if you did not belong and did not have a place? Have you felt as if you did not belong with a spouse, at your job, with your friends who seemed to be leaving you behind, or your family which was leaving you out? Have you ever been a "little one" who did not belong?

"Little ones to him belong, **they are weak, but he is strong.**" We belong to Christ. Our worth comes from God, not from our merit, nor from the opinions and judgments of others. Because we belong to God, in Christ Jesus, we are special, loved, accepted, never to be rejected. Furthermore, God has chosen the church as a vehicle of his love. We reach out to one another in his name.

Have you ever felt a supportive touch in your brokenness, your distress, to let you know that in spite of your weakness you are loved? Jesus did. I know I have. Most all of us have. For in our weakness we fully comprehend the strength of God as revealed in Jesus Christ...and shared with us through others in our faith family.

Two boys were making a cross for a parade. The pastor came up when they were putting flowers all over the cross and he said, "Boys, the cross wasn't like that at all. It was dirty, rugged, and rough." One of the boys replied, "Sir, I didn't know Jesus ever touched anything and left it the same!"

He doesn't...the One who loved the world so much that he gave his only Son...and that Son who gave his life on the cross for the whole world, for you and for me...invite us to know, and to sing....

**Jesus loves me -- and you -- this we know,
For the Bible tells us so.
Little ones -- all of us -- to him belong
For we are weak -- even in our strength --
but he is strong!**

Amen... and so be it ...

as God's love in Jesus is made known...
in my life ... and in yours.

As you remain seated, let's sing together the senior version of this beloved hymn. It's especially written for those of us with white hair, or no hair! And if you're not there yet, you can still sing and enjoy!.....