

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
28 September 2025

10:30 a.m. MT Worship
Fruit of LOVE Sunday (Global)

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“Become a Higher Love”

Third Sermon in *Cultivating the Fruit of LOVE*
Part of *Abide & Grow: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*

NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13—1 Corinthians 16:13-14—2 Corinthians 13:11-13

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

Every time I hear 1 Corinthians 13 read at a wedding, I think, “Well this is one time that maybe a lack of biblical knowledge is not such a bad thing, because if the people attending this wedding knew the context of these words, they would be gossiping about the newlyweds at the reception, wondering, *“What is going on them!? Bless their hearts...are things really that bad?! Will they make it?!”*”

Most dewy-eyed, freshly in love couples have no idea that these words were written to a people who could barely look at each other or speak to one another anymore, let alone love each other! But then again, maybe it is the perfect text to read at weddings—not for the new couple per se, but for the rest of us out in the congregation who have many more years under our belt and who are no doubt flailing around in some pretty

broken relationships—strained marriages, distant friendships, difficult family dynamics, church falling outs, divisive politics.

We need these words more than ever to remind us, yet again, of the heart of the Jewish faith that we find in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and again in the teachings of Jesus, when he crystalizes the heart of the faith into two commandments that are two sides of the same Love Coin: *love God, love others*—and actually, let’s add a third side to this *love yourself*. Because you cannot love God with all that you are (heart, mind, body, and soul) and love your neighbor as you love yourself, unless you love yourself. This is a three-way dynamic love (love God, love others, love self) that is at the heart of every relationship, and is, in fact, the currency of the kin-dom of God.

And, the people of Corinth have forgotten this. They've got the 'love themselves' part down pat. But they are confused about what it means to love others. They think 'loving others' is about loving whichever leader they are following and giving them authority over their lives, which in turn, leads to division, because they do not all agree on who has the best teachings, authority, or leadership. And if they are divided, loving only those in "their group" who are following "their leader" then they are not actually loving everyone and that means they are not loving God either. As Rev. Dr. Wil Gafney reminded us last week, "we cannot love God enough to make up for NOT loving our neighbor. To love God *is* to love neighbor.

And not loving each other is what was happening in the church of Corinth. At the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds these new Christians that they are to be "*knit together in the same mind and same purpose*" as Christ. Because he has learned that since he left them they are in factions, some saying, "*I belong to Paul,*" or "*I belong to Apollos,*" or "*I belong to Cephas,*" and few, if

any, saying "*I belong to Christ.*" (1 Corinthians 1:10-12). We might say today, "*I belong to MAGA;*" "*I belong to the liberal left;*" "*I belong to the Baptists;*" "*I belong to the Catholics.*"

In other words, the people had chosen leaders to follow who they thought represented *their* understanding of Christ, instead of following the teachings of Jesus who was the living Christ. Then and Now we are tempted to craft Christ in our own image or for the purpose of defending our policies or platforms or beliefs. Why does this happen?

Well, after the resurrection, Jesus of Nazareth—Jesus located in one time and one place and one people—became Christ of All Time and All People and All Places—the Cosmic Christ as Richard Rohr says. But some people back then took that to mean they could make Christ into whatever they wanted this 'abstract presence of God' to be for them, meaning—they can ascribe to Christ whatever ethics or behaviors suited their governing and organizing structures, whatever power they wanted to maintain, whatever hierarchy of importance or worthiness they wanted to enforce...RATHER,

than understanding that being knit together in the same mind and purpose of Christ, means the same mind and purpose of Jesus of Nazareth...Jesus, the Palestinian Jew born to an unwed teenage mother who, under an edict from the occupying power of the day had leave home for a census so that they could be taxed to support a system they would not benefit from, and so Jesus was born in temporary shelter (homeless), and later, as a two-year-old had to flee threat of political violence from a tyrannical leader and ended up a refugee in another country—all because his parents wanted to save his life—*this Jesus*...located in a time and place and having to live in the politics and powers of that place...*this Jesus* would grow up to teach us how to embody love in every day interactions with everyday people—loving the poor, the widow, the foreigner, the marginalized, the powerful, the corrupt, the ultra-religious and nonreligious, the sinner, the hungry, the thirsty, the prisoner, the possessed, the faithful who followed him, and the followers who betrayed him—THIS IS THE JESUS who is THE CHRIST, and it's *this Christ's* mind and purpose in which we are to be unified and united.

We do not get to craft Christ to conform to our ways; we are to follow the living Christ who was embodied in the life and teachings of the Jesus of the gospels, Jesus of Nazareth, and thus embody those same teaching and love in our life.

Even if we're the President, we do not get to make Christ out into anything we want him to be. Christian Nationalist's do not get to make Christ into an icon of their politics that supports their platforms and agendas and does not actually resemble anything of the Jesus of the Gospels. And neither do we get to make Christ into a deity of our choosing that supports whatever makes us feel comfortable today.

Paul reminds the Corinthians, and all of us that Christ is not a pawn in our powerplays, or a chameleon for our comfort—changing into whatever we need for the moment. Christ is actually the living presence of the divine as lived out in the love of Jesus on earth. And this is the heart that is driving Paul's writings on love.

And Jesus loved people in tangible, clear ways...that broke

the rules of even the ruling powers of his day.

This is why Paul makes 1 Corinthians 13 is so granular in its detail. He speaks of love as we discussed it last week, relationally and concretely. Love is an action verb, not a sentiment or theory.

But with the practical and “everyday,” Paul also gives us a language about love that imagines and inspires us into vision and hope beyond the Here and Now. And because we know Paul wrote these words in the midst of deep and real conflict and persecution and division and hate, we know these are not “pie-in-the-sky” naïve words about love from someone who does not know pain or division or fear; these words are birthed in the real labor of trying to learn how to love. Remember, Paul was Saul. He's got life experience to back up the whole “love your neighbor and love your enemy” thing.

Scholar Frank Crouch says, “First Corinthians 13 could also be called the “Humility Chapter,” because real love

requires humility. What happened in Corinth happens repeatedly in all times and places. Individuals and groups arise who trust only their own knowledge / hope only for the fulfillment of their own vision of how the world should be / and who “love” only those who agree with them and are like them. If they would stop and peel back all the layers of their faith and hope, Paul says, they would find only themselves or find nothing.”¹

“Paul will not let his readers (or us), however, see his words as only referring to “them.” Twenty-one times in this passage, Paul speaks in the first-person, as “I” or “we.” We best learn from this passage by applying every “I” and “we” to ourselves: “*If I **myself** have prophetic powers but lack love I am nothing...*”²

“Paul cautions us that faith and hope can lock us up into our own heads, our own errors, lead us down the paths of self-righteousness. Love, though, requires us to go outside of ourselves and beyond our own ways. Love’s humility opens us to the reality that the God of

¹ Frank L. Crouch, “Commentary on 1 Corinthians 13:1-13,” *Working Preacher* (2 Feb. 2025), accessed on Sept. 28, 2025 at <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise->

[common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-1-corinthians-131-13-9](https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-1-corinthians-131-13-9).

² Crouch, *ibid*.

love can always show us a still more excellent way.”³

And this is what leads us to the prophetic, transformational, global, and eschatological (the last word, or the study of the end things) nature of love—the love that defines the kin-dom of God. It is a “Higher Love”—and not because it’s located up high in some far off heaven. It’s a “Higher Love” because it calls us all to Rise up to its level of commitment. It’s a “Higher Love” because it asks us to see people illumined through its light, like the rays of the sun fall on everything beneath it. It is a “Higher Love” because requires us to drop the weight of hate and ego and power and pride that we are carrying so that we are light enough to be able to life others with us.

It is a “Higher Love” because as we discussed last week, if we had to rank all 9 Fruit of the Spirit, Love would be on top. Love is the Quality or Essence which defines God. Love is the Action which defines our Discipleship. Love is the Commitment we must return to, again and again, in all of our relationships. Love is the Key which will unlock the best

versions of ourselves...and others.

In a speech at the 2016 Democratic National Convention Michelle Obama famously said: *“When someone is cruel or acts like a bully, you don’t stoop to their level. No, our motto is: ‘When they go low, we go high’.”*

In an interview with Stephen Colbert, he pressed Obama, asking her if people “really have to go ‘high’” when politicians “go low.”... “I totally understand going high when somebody goes low, but the bar is so low that staying at your own altitude still means higher. Do I actually have to go up here or can I just be normal? Do I have to be a saint? Because down here, I’m pissed off!”

Obama replied: “For me, going high is not losing the urgency or the passion or the rage, especially when you are justified in it” “Going high means finding the purpose in your rage. Rage without reason, without a plan, without direction is just more rage. And we’ve been living in a lot of rage.”

³ Crouch, *ibid.*

She added that going low is “unsustainable” and explained: “If going low worked, we’d do it. It might be a ‘quick fix’ but it doesn’t fix anything over the long term.

“I’m trying to push us to think about solutions that will actually unite us and get us focused on the real problem. That’s what I mean when I say, ‘go high’. So yes, go high. America, please go high.”⁴

Reflecting on these words years later on her own Facebook page she wrote:

“For a long time, “going high” was a simple mantra that Barack and I used to encourage each other. It was a simplification of our ideals, everything we’d gleaned from our upbringings that had been simmered into us over time: Tell the truth, do your best by others, keep perspective, and find a way to stay tough through it all.

And let’s be clear: Going high doesn’t mean doing nothing. It’s not disengagement or simply turning the other cheek. It’s about making your work count and your voice heard in a way

that’s authentic to you and constructive for others. It’s about making sure your commitment to dignity and decency lights the way in everything you do—how you treat others, how you show up in the world, how you respond when your back’s against a wall.

So...let’s remember the power that lies in our words and our actions. Some folks are always going to try to bring us down. But the moment we stoop down to their level? That’s the moment we surrender our power to them. So for me, even when it’s hard, even when we don’t feel like we want to, going high will always be the answer.”⁵

We cannot control the behavior of other people. We can only control how we behave in response. And as ones who follow Jesus the Christ, we are called to behave in love, to speak with love, to see the world through the lens of love, to allow love to be the thing that disrupts our automatic impulse or response, to invite love to slow us down, to feel the love of rage burning in us at injustice and to share out the love of peace that assures us that

⁴ Kate Ng, “Michelle Obama explains her catchphrase ‘When they go low, we go high,’” *The Independent* (15 Nov. 2022), accessed on Sept. 28, 2025.

⁵ Michelle Obama Facebook post, Dec, 22, 2022.

beyond this moment we are held in something greater, deeper, and more true than the chaos and storms ripping through our world.

This is not a love that does not know suffering; this is a love born of suffering, which is why it exudes empathy. This is not a love that does not know oppression; this is a love that clings tightly to joy in the midst of oppression, because it knows that if hands over joy too, then the oppressor has been given even more power than they deserve. This is not a love that does not know betrayal or lies; this is a love that speaks truth as a throughline, because no matter the consequences, what is true keeps our integrity intact, even if everything else falls apart.

And this is a love, Paul says, “*that never ends*,” (1 Corinthians 13:8). Except the Greek words defined as “ends” here are οὐδέποτε *oudépote* (oo-dep'-ot-eh) which means “never, not ever, never at any time” and ἐκπίπτω *ekpíptō* (ek-pip'-to) which means “to fall down from, to fall off, to fall from a position, to fall powerless, to fail or give out, to lose

authority, to be thrust down from power.”⁶

It's not that love is some kind of quantity that never ends or runs out, like an endless supply of water running from a faucet or energy from a socket. No, it's that: love never fails or falls down. Which means that Love holds us up! Love cannot be thrown down. Love is an ultimate power that never gives out. Love never falls from its position and it's always higher than those who think they are above it or can control it or subdue it. Love never gives out. Love holds the weight of the world—all of it—and the knees of Love never buckle...they hold strong. Love is holding us up, like planks of a bridge that can cross even the deepest chasms in our country and communities and hearts...love is a higher and greater force than we can describe. Love is unfailing in its ability to call us into “the better angels” of our nature.

Maybe it's because I feel like everything is in a free fall right now that, to me, thinking of “love never failing or falling” is more powerful than “love never ending.” If love never ends, it's

⁶ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1601/kjv/tr/0-1/>

just this thing that goes on and on forever and we may or may not be in its sightline. But if love never fails us, or falls down, if love is the thing that is always present and always around us, then we are literally buoyed by this force—and we cannot escape it. This is a word of hope.

Though we may fail to love others and love God and love ourselves, Love itself will never fail, and in fact, cannot fail. Our failure to live in love or with love does not mean that love is still not existence or possible. No, in fact Love in it's never-failing-nature – is the very thing that is still holding us up today, giving us life and breath and being and while we can fall short of loving, Love will never fall short for us. Love cannot lose. If love never fails, then that means eventually, love will win. The love is there—continually and always—we are the ones to embody it. Love is not something we look up to see or climb up to find. Actually, love is within us and around us. There is no ladder to climb, trying to reach this special “love of God” that is only for saints or reserved for heaven in the hereafter. The “love of God” has been in fact the “*ground of all being*” as Paul Tillich says

about God...holding us, as a firm foundation forever and always...beneath us, lifting us. It's not something we have to reach and grasp for, ut something that when we abide deeply in it, will lift *us* up. Think of an elevator rising and raising, lifting us higher and higher while also still letting our feet be rooted on the ground...anchoring us, tethering us to our most true nature, so that we can fly. Like climbers who wear a harness that is belayed to something firm so they can climb and float and spring around without fear of falling—so is love our anchor, our harness, the thing that allows us to live in the fullness of who we are....free!

Paul talks beautifully about the fragility of life and our own knowledge. Saying that there are a lot of things we will not understand and cannot understand right now. But when the ‘end’ comes, that is when the kin-dom of God has been realized, we will have a fullness of revelation that we do not yet have. And what is that fullness of revelation? *To see “face to face.”* That's it! It's not to see some miracle or even to see some heavenly ethereal being...but it is to truly to see ourselves and one another ‘face-

to-face, fully known. Not through a screen or an identity eye scan machine at the airport or through masks that pull up over our faces to hide our shady behavior or with eyes cast down in shame or fear...no...but face to face, eye to eye.

Isn't it amazing that THAT is how Paul describes the fullness of revelation of what is to come when "the end" comes? When the kin-dom of God is realized here on earth? It is something so basic, so relational, so accessible to us—to see one another, face-to-face, here and now. To see one another long enough to know one another. To meet each other's gaze, in love...and to not look away when everything in us wants to.

And we know this ability for us to fully see each other and know one another is the product of love because Paul says the essence of what will 'remain' is faith, hope, and love. The word remain here in the Greek is μένω ménō (men'-o). Do you recognize that word? (I'm going to make Greek and Hebrew scholars of you one day!)

Meno is the same word used in John 15, it is the first word of

our theme: Abide. "Abide. Dwell. Remain. To be Present. To be Held Continually. To be kept forever. To wait for, to tarry or sojourn within. To endure."⁷

Faith, hope, and love tarry in our midst. They are in no rush to leave. They loiter. They are continually present in us. They hold us and keep us. We do not have to try to hold and keep a grasp on faith or hope or love; Faith, Hope, and Love keep us; Faith, Hope, and Love dwell within us, remain with us, they wait for us to wake up to their presence, they sojourn in us. They abide, continually with us. And the greatest of these three things that are just loitering and living and tarrying around in us? Love. Agape, love. Unconditional, self-less love. God's love.

Here's the mystery and miracle of it all: The Love **that never fails or falters or falls...the Love that holds us up is also the Love that Dwells within!**...the Love that allows us to see face-to-face...the Love that, will be with us, as Paul writes at the end of 2 Corinthians as he closes out his correspondence with them...the

⁷ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3306/kjv/tr/0-1/>

grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (no strings attached), the deep and abiding love of God, and the communion or fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Those are Paul's final parting words to the Corinthian people, this quarreling people: listen to this wisdom, agree with one another (in the Greek, "be of one mind," meaning be of the mind of Christ"); live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be revealed in you. That God of love and peace is already fully present...but by listening and agreeing and living in peace with one another—you will experience it...so much so that you will greet people with a Holy Kiss, not a divisive fist. You will see each other face-to-face. You will know and be known.

It's such a beautiful vision, and so you know now why these are the texts chosen for this week where we are looking at the prophetic lens of Love, the transformational lens as we seek to co-create and become the kingdom of God.

We have to imagine it because it is not yet our reality. We must speak the words as if it is and can be, otherwise we'll just come to believe more and more the

messages that tell us that hating our enemies is okay, that hurting others is "protecting us," that giving more to the wealthy at the expense of the poor is "just"...No. No. No. That is *not* the gospel of Jesus' love. But there is hope...and it lies in us!

Because this is perhaps my favorite Greek lesson of all today. 1 Corinthians 16:14: *"Let all that you do be done in love."*

Which, in the Greek is, "let all your things—**πᾶς πᾶς** (*pas*)—all of who you are as an individual, all the parts of what make you, you, let the fullness of that you (and the collective you together)—not "be done with" literally, but rather **γίνομαι** *gínomai* (*ghin'-om-ahee*)—become, or come into existence—*agape*, love.

"Let all that you do be done in love" is a fine translation and helps us remember to make love an action verb in our lives. But the Greek gives us something even stronger. *"Let all of who we are, every part of us, become love."* Or, let love come into existence through all that we are.

In other words, Let us become the Love that is already dwelling, abiding within us, the

Love that is around us and above us, this Higher Love that is beyond how we normally behave and respond on impulse, let us become this love...in our actions, in our words, in our deeds. Love is not outside of us as one more thing to do, love is something that transforms us when we realize we already have it within.

So my translation of this verse is this: *“Let the fullness of who you are **become** Love—the Love that never fails or falls...the Higher Love that holds you...Become That Higher Love so you can hold others too!...”*

It’s a challenging invitation: to not just live in love but *become* love itself. This invitation is a prophetic call, a transformational journey, a global need, and an eschatological hope within the kin-dom of God.

We will be looking at these words whenever we look at a Fruit of the Spirit this year through the global lens, represented by hands lifting up the glove shaped into a heart, becoming love itself...so remember that first of all. We want to lift up the world as a world that can become Love, that can become the Love that is

already possible here, if we all tap into it and live through that which is abiding in us. The heart-shaped globe also reminds us of how God already sees the world...as beloved...all of us, all creatures, all things that hath breath, all things that grow, all all land, all water, all insects and animals, all people.

The hands lifting up the heart-shaped globe remind us that it is not just that the world is Love-filled and Beloved, but also that we have a role, through our hands, in lifting us all up to this Higher Love. In becoming the Higher Love that God created us with capacity to become and that we will one day become. ***We are the Lifted and the Lifters!***

To Become a Higher Love is A Prophetic Call

As Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann says, “a prophet is someone that tries to articulate the world as though God were really active in the world. And, that means [prophets both] identify those parts of our world order that are contradictory to God, and talk about the will and purpose that God has for the world that will indeed come to fruition even in circumstances that we can’t

imagine. So it is both judgement and hope...”⁸

To be prophetic is both to name what is clearly not of God’s love in the world on the one hand, pointing out and naming the wrongs, while also living in the hope and reality and vision of what God’s love looks like and is. We model what we want to become...behavior before belief...a prophet believes Becoming a Higher Love is possible, but they believe that’s possible only if we change our behavior!

Becoming a Higher Love is a Transformational Journey.

As Enneagram teacher Suzanne Stabile says, “There is a big difference between change and transformation. Change is when we take on something new. Transformation occurs when something old falls away, usually beyond our control.”⁹

Which is the same sentiment of 14th century mystic, Meister Eckhart who said, “God—[Love]—is not found in the soul by adding anything, but by a process of subtraction.”¹⁰

This gets at the humility the Apostle Paul was imparting to the Corinthians, “*for now we see just a reflection, then face to face, now we know only in part, then we will know fully.*” It’s about the humility of love itself, which is patient, not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude or insisting on its own way. Love doesn’t keep a record of wrong-doings. Whews. I’ll repeat that one. Love doesn’t keep a record of wrong-doings. It rejoices in truth, which allows it to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things.

To become a Higher Love, we must un-become and let go of those things which are false props of supports: pride, ego, us vs. them language, the illusion of control. This doesn’t mean not doing anything. But it does mean, letting go of the desire to control another person’s behavior through de-humanizing language or violence or punitive measures. The stronger we have to flex our power, the more that reveals our desire to change others, instead of be transformed ourselves.

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, “What Does It Mean To Be Prophetic Today?” *Sojourners* (13 December 2017), accessed on Sept. 28, 2025 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-rVAtK5gPo&t=3s>.

⁹ Suzanne Stabile, *The Journey Toward Wholeness: Enneagram Wisdom for Stress, Balance, and Transformation* (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 2021), pg 231.

¹⁰ Stabile, *ibid.*

Transformation is about letting go and trusting that love, and seeing the needs of the person right in front of us and trying to meet those needs as our primary calling. Ego tries to protect us from others, building walls. Love cannot exist with walls, so seeks to dissolve the barriers between us and draw us closer to the abiding love of the divine which lives in our neighbor, and even in our enemy.

As feminist scholar, author, professor, bell hooks asked, *“For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?”*

And as writer Madeleine L'Engle asked in book, *The Rock that is Higher*, “Might we say that the opposite of love is power, rather than hate?”

Becoming a Higher Love begins with this kind of letting go of power and control...not to give it over to others...but to recognize that all power and control are barriers to Love.

Becoming a Higher Love is a Global Need. No one is exempt from this calling, because all of us are in this together. Despite what our Red vs Blue vs Independent vs Extremists on Either Side Culture would have us believe—we are, actually, all in this together. We are one humanity, one creation...land, animals, plants, and seas included...and all nations and peoples included. In the kingdom of God there is no United Nations needed to declare whether a people is a country or not a country, worthy of rights and life or not. In the Kingdom of God ALL are beloved. ALL are IN. And so we cannot Become a Higher Love unless all of us Become this together. This is not all who wear Red Rising above all who wear Blue. Or all who wear Blue rising about all who wear Red. This is a Rising that must include, Red, Blue, Purple, and all the colors of the Rainbow.

Becoming a Higher Love is a Global Need for All of us, and we—you and I—are a part of this. No matter how highly we esteem ourselves as voting the ‘right’ way or doing the ‘right’ things...as long as all of us are not Becoming a Higher Love together, we are not there yet. Paradoxically, the Higher Love

in which we seek to live exists within all of us right now as we are in the present, so we can't reach it apart from bringing everyone along with us....from Becoming Love, together. This is really, really hard.

As Pastor Fredrick Robinson wrote,

“The true meaning of “enemy love” is about dismantling the systems that make them enemies in the first place. To love your enemies is not to overlook harm — it is to resist it with the full force and weight of your being. Only by dismantling oppression can true love ever be possible. Indeed, to love your enemies is to work for a transformed world where the structures that create enemies no longer exist, a world where all people can thrive and enmity has no soil to grow in. Loving your enemies means hating their evil by lovingly refusing to become what they are.

The real call is to use holy imagination. To see beyond isolated verses, which can be weaponized, and instead live into Jesus' vision of a just and liberated world.”¹¹

And this leads us to this:
Becoming a Higher Love is an Eschatological Hope.

“Eschatology is a combination of two Greek words, *eschatos*, which means ‘last,’ and *logos*, meaning ‘word.’” Eschatology is the study of the ‘last word’ or ‘the end times’ as you might have heard it. Pop-culture has imagined the “end times” as some kind of rapture experience where ‘true believers’ will be taken up to heaven to be with Jesus while everyone else will be left behind as a big cosmic battle plays out. This idea of the rapture is not biblical; it’s fictional, but it certainly captures people’s imaginations, doesn’t it! And you can see why such a theology would be one that those in power would want to propagate because it instills fear and keeps people in control or worried about their behavior and their faith and if they are “in” or “out.”

But the whole idea of some are “in” and some are “out” or some are “taken up” and some are “left behind” is anti-thetical to the Jesus of the Gospels and the Good News of Christ. All are in. Always.

¹¹ Posted on his Facebook page on September 12, 2025:
<https://www.facebook.com/fredrick.robinson.735>.

I like to think of Eschatology, on a very basic level, as the sentiment from that popular quote, “*In the end, everything will be okay. If it’s not okay, it’s not the end.*” This is way over-simplified, but the point is—we are always and forever on this journey of Becoming a Higher Love, co-creating the Kin-dom of God on earth as it is in heaven, as we pray every week. And until that day, God is not going to give up on us. We are all in this together, and we are still *in it*. And there is great hope in that.

In talking about a future where all are beloved and loved and the kin-dom of God is actualized, Walter Bruggemann said,

“I think that very many church people think that the Now and the Yet-to-come is like earth and heaven. And, that has to be corrected to say the Now and Yet-to-Come are this present socioeconomic, political system and a coming socioeconomic political system that will [one day] be[come] congruent with God's reality. So, to get that model away from escape to heaven, it seems to me really important to do “futuring.” So, I

think of the prophetic promises about beating swords into plow shears and spears into pruning hooks, [as being] not about going to heaven, but about a new socioeconomic arrangement [here on earth...Literally!].”¹²

Brueggemann continues, Many of the ancient prophetic promises are about the re-ordering of the earth and I think too much Christian hope has been escapism about going to heaven and being with my dead ones or something like that...[I see God ultimately redeeming creation in the here and now through our lives and actions.] ...Jesus' parables are that. The kingdom of heaven is like.... well he didn't say it was like angels playing harps in heaven, but it's like having two sons...it's like a servant that gets paid the same way...it's this very worldly imagery that he used to characterize the kin-dom of heaven], so I've been thinking that at least in the gospel of Luke, which is the most radical, that the phrase “*Kin-dom of God*” really means a new economic arrangement and when he says, “*Repent for the King-om is at hand*,” he means reinvest in a new economy...[an

¹² Brueggemann, *ibid.*

Acts 2 economy where we share what we have with one another and all needs are met.]”...¹³

[Ultimately], I think we have to stay very close to the story of Jesus because his vulnerable way of engagement was transformative. [After all,] when John asks him whether [he’s] the Messiah, Jesus says “Well, I don’t know, but did you notice that the blind see and the lame walk or the lepers are cleansed and the dead have their debts cancelled?”¹⁴ Jesus never pointed to things beyond him; he was always directed us to that which was right in front of us.”¹⁵

Which brings us full circle back to the Becoming a Higher Love begins with us truly seeing one another face-to-face. Like really. Listening to one another. Knowing each other. We end where we begin. God’s agape love...it has been with us since the beginning, it will be with us at the end, and in the here and now it is what is upholding us and even as we are failing and falling all over the place right now, God’s love will not fail us or let us fall.

¹³ Brueggemann, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Brueggemann, *ibid.*

¹⁵ Brueggemann, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Cody J. Sanders, “Ten Ingredients for the Practice of Hope in an Era of Collapse,” *Christian Ethics Today* (10

Fellow Baptist pastor Cody Sanders says,

“To practice genuine hope in this era, we must know—really know—that things may not work out as we wish they would, yet nurture our imaginations toward new possibilities anyway...Certainty is an enemy of hope. Because if we only hope within the confines of what we already know is possible, we never reach beyond the status quo toward something that may seem impossible now. (See Romans 8:24.)... But hope pushes us beyond certainty over possibilities we believe are locked in and invites us to imagine new possibilities. The quickest way to slide into a place of hopelessness is to succumb to the belief that the way things are is the way they will always be. Nurturing your imagination for otherwise possibilities fuels hopeful orientations toward possibilities beyond the present status quo and keeps us nimble for the practice of hope.”¹⁶

Transgender sci-fi writer, Charlie Jane Anders, says,

August 2025), accessed on Sept. 28 2025 at <https://christianethicstoday.com/wp/ten-ingredients-for-the-practice-of-hope-in-an-era-of-collapse/>.

“Visualizing a happier, more just world is a direct assault on the forces that are trying to break your heart.”¹⁷

Cody Sanders also says,

“Hope looks and feels a lot like courage. Hope is risky, especially right now. The risk is not hoping and being wrong – that’s just the nature of hope. We may not get what we wish for in the end. The real risk of practicing hope is that we live our lives in such a way that the hoped for reality is the reality out of which we live, and that will put our bodies in dangerous places. It takes courage to life as if the ecological web of life matters as much our human comfort and demands that we live differently.”¹⁸

And finally, “Hope looks and feels a lot like love. Hope loses any point if there is nothing that we love enough to live our lives in audacious and courageous ways. For Christians, it should be of special significance to us that the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 said, “And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love” (v. 13, NRSVue).

¹⁷ Charlie Jane Anders, *Never Say You Can’t Survive: How to Get Through Hard Times by Making Up Stories* (New York: Tordotcom, 2021), 2-3. As quoted in Sanders article.

Not hope. Not even faith! But love. Or that the writer of 1 John, when reaching for something that we could understand that could be equated with God, said, “Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God...for God is love” (4:7-8, NRSVue).¹⁹

“So, if you feel at the end of your rope and hope is absolutely too tall an order that you can possibly manage, that’s okay. Just let go of your worry about hope for the moment and turn to others and to the ecological web of life and love it all instead. [Focus on love. Look face to face.] In loving the world and all that is in it and receiving that love back in return wherever it can be found, you will taste something even greater than hope itself. In and through love, you will know God.”²⁰

In the words of Steve Winwood from his 1986 hit, *Higher Love*:

*Think about it,
there must be higher love
Down in the heart
or hidden in the stars above
Without it,
life is wasted time
Look inside your heart,*

¹⁸ Sanders, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Sanders, *ibid.*

²⁰ Sanders, *ibid.*

I'll look inside mine

*Things look so bad everywhere
In this whole world,
what is fair?
We walk blind and we try to see
Falling behind in what could be*

*Bring me a higher love
Bring me a higher love
Bring me a higher love
Where's that higher love I keep
thinking of?²¹*

No disrespect to Steve
Winwood, but instead of pleaing
“Bring me a Higher Love,” we
might say,

*Become a Higher Love
Become a Higher Love
Become a Higher Love
WE ARE the Higher Love
we keep dreaming of...*

Amen.

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higher_Love