

**A FATHER'S LOVE**  
**BLC – EASTER VI – B. HULL SOMERS**

***Acts 10:44-48, 1 John 5:1-6, John 15:9-17***

Last Thursday, my vibrant, energetic dad got up, had devotions, and wrote an entry in his diary which he meticulously kept for decades. He rode 15 miles on his bicycle. He visited a new friend who was ill. He watched a granddaughter's play on YouTube; he packed a bag to attend grandparent's weekend at my niece's boarding school. He planted an orange tree in his backyard, and then he went to the front yard to plant some aloe vera that he had been gifted by a friend. After planting the aloe vera he dropped from a massive stroke that separated his brain from his brain stem leaving him brain dead and paralyzed. Within 36 hours he had breathed his last.

Today's Scriptures are all about God's all-encompassing love. About love that breaks the bonds of religion, smashes through tradition, conquers death and liberates the human heart.

It is a love that was first taught to me by my dad.

He raised me and my four siblings with a lot of hopes and dreams but with one main goal: that we would know the love of God and live in the way of Jesus. It was truly his greatest and most fervent hope for us.

Many of you who have seen his obituary and seen many of the posts on social media know that my father was a great humanitarian. His deep faith compelled him. His favorite prayer was his mantra, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can." And he lived it.

He was tireless in his service to others – leading dozens of medical mission trips to underserved communities all over the world, starting a birthing center and women’s literacy center to champion women in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, dreaming up and starting a clean water project sponsored by rotary that will affect thousands, serving and giving tirelessly to the church, local nonprofits and environmental stewardship organizations, and generally being creative about how his life impacted the world.

Looking at the sum of all of these accomplishments makes him seem larger than life.

But he was not larger than life. He was a human being – a good dad and a silly grandpa. He was a man who loved Jesus and abided in God’s love as our Gospel text encourages this morning – he was rooted and grounded in love. That should be a normal old Christian thing for each of us.

This morning, I am going to share a few things that my dad, a regular Christian, taught me about love.

My dad taught me that love shows up. My dad had his own business that was constantly expanding because of his energy and drive. And yet I cannot remember him missing family dinners at 5:30 on the dot. When my younger brother and I started high school and had after school responsibilities with sports and plays and clubs and friends he realized that before school was a moment to be with us, and so he learned to make a couple of breakfast dishes and made us breakfast every morning before school. He got up very early to do his workouts and devotions so that he could spend twenty minutes with two surly teenagers. For games, pain, joy, celebrations or work – my dad taught me that love shows up.

My dad taught me that love changes our minds. My dad was raised in a fundamentalist church and household. He was raised to believe that being a Christian was as much what you don't do, as what you do. In the 80s he did not allow my older sister to wear Levis to school, which she, of course, snuck in her backpack. He was, for a long time, suspicious of rock music. And do not get him started on cigarettes, alcohol or bikinis. But as my dad grew in his love for Jesus, his heart and mind began to change. God's love through the Holy Spirit expanded and changed him. One year, at Christmas, he symbolically showed this to us kids by giving us an enormous wrapped box with all of our names on it. When we opened it, we were shocked to find it was filled with bottles of wine. He wanted us to know that was giving up the rules he had known to walk forward into faith and relationship, trusting us that if we wanted to drink wine and love Jesus at the same time, we could do that. He never drank the stuff, and, as a health nut, hated the data on red wine's benefits to heart health, but he changed his mind. When I left my former denomination because of their hard stance against the inclusion of LGBTQ children of God in the church, he was my biggest cheerleader. He was so proud of me for standing for the Good News of God in Jesus Christ. He became an ELCA Lutheran and never joined another church that was not inclusive as Jesus was inclusive. My dad changed his theology over time because God's love changes our minds.

My dad taught me that love demands action. My dad did not just think thoughts, he did his thoughts. He reached out and asked for forgiveness when it was hard. He worked tirelessly on projects that would bring light and life to people around the globe. He got his hands dirty if his friends needed help. If he was convicted by a sermon, a Scripture or through prayer, he did the hard work to reconcile with God and others. He taught me that love demands action.

My dad taught me that love was not “right.” In other words, love chooses relationships over opinions or principles. He would say “pick your battles” and would not pursue a course of action that included hurting someone he cared for. He was an incredible example of letting things go that were unnecessary. Whether it be a political position, theological disagreement, a messy room or blue hair on his teenage daughter – he chose the person over the opinion. Every time.

My dad taught me that love puts life into the world. The fact that his last day included exercise, visiting a friend and planting things in the earth is so appropriate. His career was spent attempting to help folk become healthier and happier. His philanthropy was to infuse life into life. Even his hobbies – gardening and exercise and cracking bad dad jokes – were life-giving. My dad taught me that love puts life into the world.

All these lessons of love were lessons that my dad first learned from God. He was, as our Gospel text urges us all to be, a friend of God, rooted and grounded in that primary relationship.

How he lived was what he honed over decades in that relationship spent in prayer, worship and the Word. He was not perfect; he practiced, failed and tried again. His friendship with God and his ability to live in God’s love and be a part of the flow of that love through the power of the Holy Spirit was all a part of his connection with the one who first loved him.

I think he was special because he was my dad, but he was not more special than you. You who were chosen by the Most High God to be created – lovingly knitted together in your mother’s womb. You are fully loved and fully accepted. You were placed in this particular time,

in this particular universe, in this particular community with your own beautiful gifts and brokennesses to be alive and to love God.

We are all invited to be friends with God, to be rooted deeply in God's love and to live in a way that proclaims the Good News. Each one of us. I pray that the life of Larry D. Hull and all the saints would inspire us and light our way. Regular Christians living in God's extraordinary love.

I will end today with the final entry that my father put in his journal. It was a prayer. May it be today, the prayer of all of our hearts.

“Love you God! And hope I can do my part to love your children and your creation.”

Amen.

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