

We have had a lot of sunshine the last few weeks in Michigan. We should cherish these days because the sun seems to disappear for most of the winter. Any day the sun shines is a good day in Michigan.

Stevie Wonder sang, “You are the sunshine of my life, that’s why I’ll always be around.” These words sound like something the Lord would say to us. He let’s His love shine on us and through. Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16) He also promised to always be with us. That makes all the difference knowing that God loves us and is always watching over us, protecting and guiding us.

The next line in the song comes straight out of Psalm 17:8. The Psalmist asked the Lord, “Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.” To be the apple of someone’s eye is to be cherish, love, special. We are loved and cherished by the Lord. Because we are special to Him, He protects us and forever we will stay in the Lord’s heart.

Jesus spoke the words recorded in John 15 on the night of His Last Supper with the Disciples. That was the night that Jesus took the bread and the wine of the Passover meal, gave them to the Disciples and declared that this was the New Covenant in His blood. This was the new beginning God had promised to His people. While it is new to us, it was not new to God. Wonder sang, “I feel like this is the beginning, though I’ve loved you for a million years.” God has always loved us and He always will. He loved us before we took our first breath. And He will continue to love us in eternity with Him in His Kingdom.

The next lines remind me of what Jesus experienced in the Garden on the night of His arrest. After the Passover meal was over, Jesus took the Disciples with Him to a garden on the Mount of Olives, outside of the wall of the city of Jerusalem. Jesus asked the Disciples to watch and pray while He went off by himself to pray. Jesus was praying for the strength to face the cross and total separation from God the Father. Jesus knew that if He did not do this, we would be lost forever, always separated from Him. His sorrow was real. His agony was so great that his sweat contained droplets of blood.

Why did Jesus do this? Listen to the words from Stevie’s song and think about our relationship with God. “You must have thought that I was lonely because you came to my rescue.” Think how lonely Adam and Eve must have felt the first night they spent out of the Garden. King David went through some tough times and prayed, “Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.” (Psalm 25:16)

Jesus answered David’s prayer. He answers you and mine. Sin cuts us off from God and we can’t do anything about it. Jesus said in the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus that there was such a large separation between heaven and hell that no one could ever go from one place to the

other. We would be lost, cut off and alone if Jesus did not rescue us from sin and give us a new life. But He did that for us because He loves us. We will never be alone because the Lord holds us in His heart. Jesus said, **“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit.”** (John 15:5) But we are not lost or cut off. We are united connected with Jesus through the gift of faith.

The song continues, **“I know this must be heaven. How could so much love be inside of you?”** We can hope for heaven on earth, but that doesn’t happen. Jesus gives us the promise of heaven. He said that there are many rooms in the Father’s House and that when He returned to heaven, He was going to prepare a place for us. Even though we don’t deserve it or even understand it, God loves us so much that Jesus stretched out His arms on the cross for us. Jesus said, **“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”** (Matthew 15:13) That is what Jesus did for us.

God’s love is always on the move. God the Father loves Jesus. Jesus loves His Disciples. Jesus said, **“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.”** (John 15:9) The Disciples could not keep God’s love to themselves. Jesus told them to love one another. He also said, **“Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”** (John 13:35) God’s love is on the move. His chain of should not be broken. God’s love goes from the Father to Jesus to the Disciple to one another and to the world.

Jesus said, **“This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.”** (John 15:12) Christ like love shows itself in action. If you look at the early Christians you may wonder how such a small group of people were able to change the world in such a short period of time. It wasn’t easy. The early Christians were persecuted, marginalized, and lived in a culture that wanted to cancel them.

But they couldn’t do it because the first Christian had the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised, **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** (Acts 1:8) The first Christians had the Holy Spirit to empower them and enable them to be witnesses for Jesus. We have the same Spirit.

The early Christians were able to change the world for Jesus because they lived and acted in love. They were different from the people around them who did not love or care for one another. When babies were deserted by their parents, Christians took them into their homes and raised them. When people fled the cities because of the plague, the Christians went into the cities to care for the sick. They didn’t just talk about God’s love, they lived it out.

Just like Jesus, the early Christians were not concerned about political power. They were concerned about people. Jesus did not try to create an earthly kingdom or amass power for Himself. He told Pontius Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world. Jesus humbled Himself by dying on the cross to save us.

We need to become more like Jesus. We need to be less concerned about winning America and more concerned about loving, caring, serving our fellow Americans. The mission we share here at Open Arms is “***Serving People! Sharing Jesus! Sending Servants!***” When we do that, the Holy Spirit will work in their lives to make new Disciples of Jesus Christ.

Our mission in our divided nation is not to just be right, not to win political battles, not to win arguments and lose friends. Our mission is to love one another as Jesus loves us. After all, Jesus wants the people who do not know Him to receive the sunshine of His love so that He they will forever stay in His heart.