

## INCONCEIVABLE!

February 15, 2009/Pastor Joyce Reed/Crossroads, La Paz, MX

### 1 John 4:7-21

#### *God Is Love*

<sup>7-10</sup>My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God, because God is love—so you can't know him if you don't love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God.

<sup>11-12</sup>My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other. No one has seen God, ever. But if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and his love becomes complete in us—perfect love!

<sup>13-16</sup>This is how we know we're living steadily and deeply in him, and he in us: He's given us life from his life, from his very own Spirit. Also, we've seen for ourselves and continue to state openly that the Father sent his Son as Savior of the world. Everyone who confesses that Jesus is God's Son participates continuously in an intimate relationship with God. We know it so well, we've embraced it heart and soul, this love that comes from God.

#### *To Love, to Be Loved*

<sup>17-18</sup>God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we're free of worry on Judgment Day—our standing in the world is identical with Christ's. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love.

<sup>19</sup>We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first.

<sup>20-21</sup>If anyone boasts, "I love God," and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.

How many of you have seen the movie “The Princess Bride”? It is a classic fantasy story of a young woman and a young man, a quest for adventure, treasure, identity, and true love. In this movie there is a character called Vizzini. And every time that he comes across a situation that surprises him, catches him off guard, or totally amazes him, he utters the word “Inconceivable!”

To me, it is inconceivable that our family has almost completed the 5<sup>th</sup> year of our second mission term in La Paz. This July, we will leave for one year of U.S. assignment in order to speak to our supporting churches, as well as to reconnect with family, and to rest. It is a subject that many of you would like to avoid with us. Some of you have said, “I don’t want to talk about that.” Or, “I wish you wouldn’t go.” Or, “What are we going to do for a whole year without you?” And many of these thoughts mirror our own. Transition and change stir up a whole mix of emotions.

David and I decided that we would like to create a forum to begin to talk about some of these emotions. Because, let’s be honest, most of us are not healthy when it comes to saying goodbye, even if it’s temporary. We love hellos. We love all the celebrations that come in the middle. But we often flounder at goodbyes. We put up walls. We avoid. We get angry. We accuse. We grieve. We’re great at making each other feel worse, instead of better.

Now, for some of you, I have already set off all your panic buttons by using the words Goodbye, Grief, and Transition in the first three paragraphs of my sermon! So let me reassure you with this Good News right off the bat:

The Baptist Convention of Southern Baja extended an invitation to David and me to return for a third term of ministry in La Paz. And we said, Yes! So, in July 2010, God-willing, we’ll be back! Our journey together as community, as pastors and congregation, as ex-patriots, as friends, as brothers and sisters in Christ will have more chapters. It is changing, taking a new twist, but it has not concluded.

But before we can look ahead to that year of transition we first need to take a journey into the past, looking at what we’ve learned together over the last five years. In order to look forward clearly, we need to understand how God has already been at work in our midst. Using the image from last week’s sermon, I’m going to share how I see God maturing our community . . . how God has been pushing us out of the nest so that we learn to fly . . . how God has been destroying our nests so that we learn to soar into our full potential.

When people visit Crossroads, whether it is for the first time, over several weeks, or even if they have been attending for years, we invariably hear this remark, “There is so much love here! I’ve never been in a church where I feel so loved.”

Since Crossroads began meeting at this location in May 2004, and probably even the three years before that when it met in a storefront on Prieto and before that in our living room, loving unconditionally has been a spiritual gift of this community.

I John 4:7 says, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.” This is a Bible verse that I see lived out every week as you gather together. Granted, some weeks we probably do it better than others, but loving unconditionally is a central focus of Crossroads.

Why is that? Perhaps because so many of us have come from churches where we weren’t loved. We have come out of churches where we were judged, attacked, and beaten down instead of built up. So we want Crossroads to be different. Perhaps it is because many of us grew up in families where we didn’t experience love, and so we’re determined that our family in Christ will model something different. Perhaps it is because we want our world to look different. We want to see more joy, more peace, more love birthed in our midst. So we choose to live love in our faith community, praying that it will spread far and wide as we share authentically with one another.

Whatever the reason, or reasons, loving unconditionally is part of Crossroad’s history, and part of our future. God is changing us as we choose to love.

Second, I see our community living out our vision statement: Sharing the Living Water of Jesus Christ with thirsty people. We are quenching thirsty souls with Jesus.

I John 4:10 says, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

This verse reminds us that love is initiated by God . . . and God’s deepest expression of his love for us was sending Jesus to be with us, to live with us, to die for us as the perfect sacrifice. Sin can be broken in our lives. A relationship with Jesus restores us to God.

And this is what Jesus talked about with the Samaritan woman at the well. This is where the image of Living water comes from. Jesus sat down and had an

extraordinary conversation with an ordinary person about a drink of Living Water for her thirsty soul.

Crossroads has never been about beating people up with the Gospel. It has always been about loving people through everyday life. Whether it's a sip of water, a cup of water, or a whole pitcher of water . . . gently helping someone re-discover a relationship with Jesus is another part of our journey with one another.

Loving Unconditionally.  
Quenching Thirst with Living Water.

Third, I see our community growing in mission. When you are loved, when you are affirmed, when you're no longer dying of thirst, then you have energy to serve others. And I see a lot of you branching out into service, especially in the last six months.

I John 4:11-12 says, "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." And I John 2:6 echoes, "Whoever claims to live in him, must walk as Jesus did."

As we love each other, then we show God to each other. If we claim to love Jesus, then we will walk as Jesus did. So how do I see Crossroads living this out?

Ana and Rodolfo . . . through the event of being unjustly sued by your neighbor concerning the construction of your house, you chose to keep loving your neighbor, of offering him sips of living water despite his vindictiveness. Your witness even had an impact on your wider circle of Mexican friends who were amazed at your ability to love your enemy. Jesus was glorified by your choice to love.

Mimi and Gerry . . . when a career with AeroCalifornia slammed shut, and your life was turned upside down as a result, God gave you a vision to open a new business. It was going to be a huge risk, but you took it believing it would bring your family closer together. You chose family over economic security. And your witness is changing every person that walks into Comes Y Te Vas. They find not only physical food, but spiritual food as well. Jesus is being glorified by your choice to love God, your family, and others.

Milton and Susu, you are growing in mission as you choose to love and adopt a second child. Rich Fuller, you began a men's ministry in order that men would grow in their love and knowledge of God and each other. Kim, you're quilting pillowcases for kids and showing them that even a stranger loves them. Fidel & Eileen, despite your multiplying health concerns, you are always loving your neighbors through crisis after crisis. Elaine, you have a vision to begin a ministry to the elderly and disabled of La Paz called Hope House, a place where they will be loved and respected. Women of Crossroads, you are growing in mission as you reach out to those with cancer with the prayer quilts.

These are only a few examples of how God is growing us in mission, is giving us opportunity to serve, is allowing us to soar like eagles.

Finally, I see our community casting out fear in love.

I John 4:18 says, "There is no fear in love, because perfect love drives out fear."

We're back to love. Three weeks ago Rodolfo reminded us that the Gospel can be reduced to just one word: Love. When we choose to love, we cast out fear. We become warriors for God. Warriors of Peace. Warriors of Justice. Warriors of Righteousness. Warriors of Light. Warriors of Hope. We are not afraid to march forward into the dark places, into the places where there is struggle, and chaos, and conflict, because our armor is God's love. Perfect love casts out fear.

Some of you might remember Jenny and Erle Radel. They were a couple that moved here from Hawaii. Jenny's mother Alice also lived with them. They had planned to live out the rest of their years in La Paz. But that was not God's plan. Due to unexpected health issues, both Jenny and her mom needed to return to the United States. So after two years, they packed up and made a major move again. I asked them recently what had been their experience with Crossroads, and what they learned about God in the process of change and transformation. They wrote:

*We felt we were led to Crossroads by the Lord because we immediately found true family. It was a living expression of the earliest churches we read about in Acts, chapters 2-4. We made many close ties, deep, life-long friendships—eternal friendships. People completely different from us, with life experiences we did not understand became true family as we struggled together to live the gospel lives Jesus asked of us. In part, because of the deep heartfelt love we found at Crossroads, we have been able to carry on in our new retirement community,*

*Good Samaritan Village. You are all missed and deeply loved and remain daily in our prayers.*

There is no fear in love, because perfect love casts out fear.

And so here we stand, approximately five months from a momentous change for Crossroads . . . your pastors will be leaving for one year . . . but we do not have to be afraid. David and I don't have to be afraid for you. And you don't have to be afraid for us. We don't have to be afraid of what will happen during that year. Because we can look at the past five years and see how God has been nurturing us, loving us, pushing us out of the nest, preparing us to soar. And so we can trust that God is not only with us now, today, here in this moment, but will also be with us in the months, the year to come.

Inconceivable! But true!

Loving Unconditionally.  
Quenching Thirst with Living Water.  
Growing in Mission.  
Casting our Fear.

In 1881 Leo Tolstoy wrote a story called "It is Love that Humans Live By." It was written in three episodes. This is short version of the first episode. (Share the story)

If we let the story's images unfold not only in our minds but in our hearts, we realize that the husband and wife have welcomed God—who has sent himself in the form of an Angel. Semyon clothes the naked. Matriona feeds the hungry. They have seen the Christ-among-us.

Matthew 10:38-42 (The Message) says this:

<sup>38-39</sup>"If you don't go all the way with me, through thick and thin, you don't deserve me. If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you'll find both yourself and me.

<sup>40-42</sup>"We are intimately linked in this harvest work. Anyone who accepts what you do, accepts me, the One who sent you. Anyone who accepts what I do accepts my Father, who sent me. Accepting a messenger of God is as good as being God's messenger. Accepting someone's help is as good as giving someone help. This is a

large work I've called you into, but don't be overwhelmed by it. It's best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won't lose out on a thing."

Loving unconditionally. Sharing cool cups of water with those who are thirsty. Growing in mission. Casting out fear when we embrace God's perfect love.

That's been our story with this faith community for the past five years. At the end of June, we will stand at a new crossroads. Next week David and I will share a sermon that addresses what one does when you're at a crossroads of life, not only as an individual, but also as a community of faith. And hopefully, today's sermon, and next week's sermon, will set the stage for our conversations during our church meeting after worship next week.

Let us pray . . . Dear God, despite all the changes that are happening around us, in our own personal lives, and in the life of our church community, we know for certain this truth: You do not change. You are the same yesterday, today, and forever. We need not fear what lies ahead. We can claim it with boldness and with total peace of heart. We look for the Christ among us and minister in your blessed name. Amen.