

In God's Hands
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The following are extracts or paraphrases from chapter 4: You are loved

We are loved despite of ourselves

- a) Many, if not most, of us have been inveigled into believing that we had to impress God in order for God to love us... We work ourselves into a frazzle, in order to be considered admirable and worthy of approbation and love.
- b) Of course, there are many situations in our lives where it is perfectly appropriate to demand the best, which then wins our approbation. When we are ill ... we would be silly in the extreme to say that we would be satisfied with the attentions of any old quack - No, we want the best available physician, who did brilliantly at medical school. ... so, there are spheres when ability is an important, indeed crucial criterion. But in the matter of our relation to God, it is totally inappropriate. God does not love us because we are lovable.
- c) In Romans 5, St Paul says "whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". St Paul is, as we should be, bowled over by such an extravagant and generous love... he goes on to say that it is a very rare and unlikely thing to die for another, though perhaps one might consider dying for a good person. But to die for a malefactor? No, that is wholly improbable. And yet that is precisely what has happened in the case of our redemption. It was whilst we were at our worst, at our most unattractive, at our most repulsive – that is when this All-Holy One decided to shed His blood for us.

God has always loved us

- a) God loved us even before we were created ... God says to Jeremiah "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you..." ... God says to Jeremiah "Even before you were an idea in anyone's head, let alone already in existence; even before you were conceived, *I knew you.*" Right at the beginning of the Epistle to the Ephesians ... the author makes an assertion that echoes that incredible claim found in Jeremiah: "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world."
- b) That is quite breath-taking: that Jeremiah was no afterthought, no accident. And this breath-taking fact applies to each and every one of us – before we were conceived, God knew that there was going to be a you and a you and a YOU.
- c) St Julian of Norwich says God did not begin to love us; God's love for us is as eternal as God is eternal ... I have been loved from all eternity. I am loved now, unreservedly, and God will love me unto the ages of ages. God does not change, so God's love for me, for you, is unchanging and unchangeable.

God wants us

- d) God's love is a love that is prevenient: a love that goes before, that precedes any achievement or effort on our part. How could I do anything before I existed? ... Then it must be as clear as anything that God's love for me, God's acceptance of me, is sheer gift.
- e) God created us, not because God *needed* us, but wonderfully, exhilaratingly, God created us because God *wanted* us.

The consequences of God's love

- f) God so loved the world that God gave, to us and to the whole of God's creation, the greatest gift that God could give: not this or that thing, but nothing less than God-self in God's greatest gift – God's Son.
- g) God offered us God's Son, not just on the cross but in the entire business of the Incarnation. Jesus, the Son of God, divested Himself of the glory and privilege of His divinity, and took on the form of a slave (with all the weakness, and all the humiliation and indignity of a slave), and was obedient, even up to being done to death on the Cross by His own creatures... He did all these things to demonstrate the deep love He had for us.
- h) For God, there is no one who has a first-class ticket to hell. God, our God, invests all of the divine love and concern in each one of us...God gives God's all, at every single moment, to each single one of us; to the good and the bad and the indifferent.
- i) Origen, (a theologian of the Early Church) taught that the divine love is so appealing, so attractive and so irresistible that, in the end, even the Devil will be unable to resist it, and so even the Devil and his demon angels will be drawn back into the heaven of the God of love, when God will truly be All in All. This is how evil will be destroyed; not by recalcitrant and miscreants being thrown into flames that will burn forever.
- j) God hopes that we, who have experienced the wonder and depth of God's love, will be enlisted in God's team, to seek to draw in those outside, by emulating God's ways.
- k) We are enabled to love at all only because He first loved us, and was ready to give His all for us – not just when we were good, but especially when we were utterly underserving of that divine love.

Questions

1. Which of the selected passages above most speaks to you? Why?
2. St Julian of Norwich says God did not begin to love us; God's love for us is as eternal as God is eternal. We do not need to do anything to curry favour with God. Can we imagine that? I have been loved from all eternity. I am loved now, unreservedly, and God will love me unto the ages of ages.
 - a. *If God's love is unconditional and everlasting, why should we bother to behave as we believe God wants us to?*
 - b. *What are the implications of this for the way we behave towards others?*
3. Later, she describes another vision where she is deeply puzzled because she sees nowhere that God blames us. And she cannot reconcile what appear to be clearly contradictory truths: the incontrovertible fact that we are sinners, and what has been revealed to her – that God does not blame us, and that nowhere is God wrathful, or taking us to task for our sins.
 - a. *What might God blame us for?*
 - b. *How does God respond to our sins?*