



Calvary Presbyterian Church  
Sunday, April 23, 2023

**LOVE WITH SKIN ON: For All the People**  
Pastor Eyde Mabanglo

**SCRIPTURE—Psalm 116**

<sup>1</sup>I love the Eternal; for not only does He hear my voice, my pleas for mercy,  
<sup>2</sup>But He leaned *down when I was in trouble and brought* His ear close to me.  
So as long as I have breath, I will call on Him. <sup>3</sup>Once I was wound in the  
wrappings of death; the terror of *dying and* the grave had a grip on me; *I*  
*could not get away*, for I was entombed in distress and sorrow. <sup>4</sup>Then I  
called on the name of the Eternal: "O Eternal One—I am begging You—save  
me!"

<sup>12</sup>How will I pay back the Eternal for all His graciousness toward me? <sup>13</sup>I will  
raise the cup of deliverance and call out the name of the Eternal.

<sup>14</sup>**I will fulfill the promises I made to Him here as a witness to all His people.**

<sup>15</sup>Precious in the eyes of the Eternal are the deaths of those who follow after  
Him. <sup>16</sup>O Eternal One, *You know* I am Your servant. I am Your servant, a child  
of Your maidservant, *devoted to You*; You have cut me loose from the chains  
*of death* that bind me. <sup>17</sup>And I come, eager to offer a sacrifice of gratitude  
and call on the name of the Eternal. <sup>18</sup>**I will fulfill the promises I made to**  
**Him here as a witness to all His people** <sup>19</sup>In the courts of the Eternal's  
temple, among the people of *God's city*, O Jerusalem. Praise the Eternal!

**SERMON**

My birthday party looked a bit like a Passover meal.  
A dinner party with about ten of us seated around a long oval table.

Gathered face to face—I knew everyone, but some had only heard stories about one another. And we told lots of stories—stories of meeting, stories of life together, and stories of deliverance.

And there was a feast—including a special recipe of amazing spaghetti sauce from my recently departed brother in law, bread and brownies from a friend I've only known for four years—but we have mutual friends who we've known for much, much longer, including my cousin who brought the salad and wine, friends from several churches that I've served over the last 20 years, including the one who brought the cake—she has brought me cake for birthday celebrations since our boys were five years old.

And there were gifts—Gifts from friends who listened—inclined their ears, inclined their hearts without judgement, like from my friend Julie who gave me the first gift that I opened...

The gift of Anglican prayer beads—I wondered about hanging them from my rear-view mirror, but I didn't want it to sound irreverent...Then she said I thought you could hang them from your rearview mirror because you were in your car when you had your last panic attack.

Yes, it was like a Passover meal...listening to stories from friends who listened to my story.

And my response to it all was simply love.

Was proclaiming their trustworthiness,

Calling out their name and their blessing to me—sharing with all the ways they were Christ to me.

Lifting a glass and making a toast for all to hear

My toast was about the losing of myself, the untwisting of myself, the becoming/returning to myself.

Yes, a toast for all to know that my God listens, my God hears...And I know this because my friends listen, and my friends hear...

My God rescued me by sending me loved ones to walk alongside me in this one wild and precious life.

2022 was filled with heartache, anguishing over broken relationships, grief writing in the form of haiku and prayers and tearful songs. I booked the cottage where my family has spent most of the last 15 Thanksgivings together. I sent my closest friends a "save the date" invitation at Christmas

for the few days in April that I would celebrate my birthday and the last year that they walked beside me as I became a healthier, truer, and more beautiful version of myself.

Like the psalmist, I needed to give a “shout out”

A Birthday Haiku  
Best. Birthday. Ever.  
Untwisting my truest self  
A year with my tribe

And how about you? How has the Lord untwisted your body, mind, and soul over the last year.

How is the Spirit still untwisting you this morning through the scriptures this morning—how will you allow the Spirit to help you become your truest self?

The psalmist is gushing from the beginning of today’s psalm. I love...I love the Lord...I love...because God hears me.

God inclines his ear—literally stretches his lobes and bends down to reach my shaky voice, my whispered prayers, my troubled heart...and we all know sorrow at times. For me 2022 was a year of sorrow, but maybe the last week has been a year of sorrow for you. There are troubled waters that run through our daily routines, our relationships, our news feeds, our still and quiet moments where we reflect on how God is moving in our midst or even how it feels like we are still waiting for God to move...in our midst. And in such times, we may be tempted to let joy sneak around in the shadows of our despair—allow laughter to grow faint—hide the contentment that comes from knowing God is here. If we stop remembering all the things that God has done, the numerous ways that the Spirit intervenes in our lives every day, the blessings that come from knowing that the God of the universe knows our name...then we are not living our truest self, because our truest self (the Spirit of Christ within us) knows the One who abides, dwells, resides, deep within the recesses of our very essence.

Just as God bends and inclines and stretches to meet us in these sacred spaces, we too stretch to find truth and validation even in the midst of tough

days. We stretch—we stretch inward to examine the source and the depth of our sadness AND we stretch—we stretch outward to those who walk beside us, finding those who are willing to walk with us and finding those who need us to walk with them. This bending and this stretching is the ebb and flow of discipleship. We bend to self. We bend to God. We bend to neighbor. We bend to other. We bend to become the person God created us to be...to become Love with Skin On.

When we call out the words—save me, God hears. When we call out the words—help me, God helps.

And this is why I gathered and celebrated and toasted my friends on my birthday last Monday. I wanted to acknowledge and shout out loud how these ten women are Eternal Love with Skin On. They are the incarnate witness of a God who hears and a God who helps. My deliverance comes from them as they were sent, no doubt, by the One who is still named Immanuel—God with us.

And like the Psalmist, I wondered what I could possibly give the One who still hears my cries—and the most appropriate offering, the most appropriate prayer, is to say thank you...a sacrifice of gratitude—and we call this a toast—a public accolade, a spoken praise and proclamation of the God who is always loving, always “mercy-ing”, and always gracing us with gift bag after gift bag after gift bag of blessing and stories of deliverance.

To worship God is to pant after his heart, to followeth hard after Thee, to meditate on his very essence—his name—noon and night. And it is pure worship to raise a proverbial glass and toast the One who is all-knowing, ever-present, steadfast, faithful, and Love Eternal—Love Incarnate—Love with Skin On.

It is praise in the presence of others that we best bring blessing to God—to say his name out loud and live his love out loud and tell stories of blessing out loud. It is why we are here together this morning...in person and online. Praising God publicly—This is our worship. This is our purpose. This is our witness.

God cares for every one of us—and so he grieves when we are not experiencing the abundant life that Christ procured for us. To live as though

there were no God, no grace, no purpose - is to choose to reside in grief and sorrow, to separate ourselves from the promises of God that sit like unopened gift bags set upon the floor. A spiritual freedom, a heart-healing presence is always at the ready—all the things that bind us, ensnare us, restrict us—hurt, addiction, pride, dominance, greed, betrayal, shame—have been taken away. We've been delivered...if we accept the delivery. We've been saved...if we accept the offer. We've been set free...if we are willing to trust the One who bends, inclines, hears—the One who is Love with Skin On.

So, let us call upon the name of the Lord. Let us give a shout out to the One who loves us. Let us make sure that there are rituals of remembrance built not only into our birthdays or our Sunday worship, but the morning worship of every weekday of every week of every year going forward. Let us remember all the blessings of God. Let us tell these stories out loud in the center of our worship spaces, in the center of our communities, in the center of our lives. This is how we fulfill our promises to God, our purpose from God, and our call to be Love with Skin On in the presence of all the people.

Our God is a bending God, and we cannot escape his inclining ear to the whispers of our soul and the prayers of our heart. We, too, are to be Love with Skin on—an embodiment of the Spirit of Christ. There's no depth that Christ has not plunged; therefore, let us find more ways to bend ourselves, incline ourselves, hear ourselves the cries and whispered prayers of those around us—those desperate to hear our personal and shared stories of deliverance. Let us find more ways to raise our glass and toast God.

Let us end our reflection on Psalm 116 with the gushing first words of the psalmist—

### Psalm 116

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<sup>2</sup>But He leaned *down when I was in trouble and brought* His ear close to me.  
So as long as I have breath, I will call on Him.

May it be so. May it be so.

