

This is Rev. Ted Atkinson, Pastor of Knox United
Presbyterian Church on the corner of Elmwood and Kinsey
Avenues in ~~Hammer~~ ^{Hammer} N.Y.
When I was in elementary school I was infatuated with

a girl in my home-room named Dreema Adkins. It caused me great pain that she seemed to have no reciprocal liking for me. One day I asked a friend to try to find out if she liked me. The friend complied with my request and brought back her answer. "Dreema says she likes all the boys so she must like you." That wasn't what I wanted to hear. I wanted to hear that she had a special liking for me. None of us wants to be loved in general. We all want to be loved in particular. It is no comfort for a son or a daughter to be told by their father, "Of course I love you. I love everybody." You will never hear any wife who loves her husband say to him, "I think that you are unfair for loving me but not our next door neighbor. Why should you love me and not her when she is so much more beautiful than I am."

But when it comes to God many people seem to think that it's unfair for God to love anybody in particular or any group of people in particular. Why should God love one person and not another? Why should he love one nation, such as the ancient nation of Israel and not another? Why should he love the Church which is the new Israel and no one else?

God does love the whole world in general. We can't deny that. "For God so loved the world..." ~~we read~~. Everybody in the world has experienced something of God's love. He created

all of us. He has given us all so many material blessings. Even the most destitute beggar in Indian knows something of this general love that God has toward his creation. For those ^{whose listening} ~~of us~~ here this morning God has shown us his love by giving us homes and money and loved ones and jobs. He has given us freedom to worship in this country. He has given us bodies and our senses to enjoy the pleasures of this world. God does love the world in general. ~~He shows his love for you today by bringing you here this morning to hear his word and to sing his praises.~~ Every breath that we take is a sign of God's continuing love and patience with us. At any moment he could simply withdraw his protecting hands from us and allow us to experience tragedy, sickness, and death. It is only because God loves the unrepentant sinner that He stays his execution and allows him time to repent and trust Christ. So there is a sense in which God loves us all in general.

But God has a people whom he loves in a special way as a husband loves a wife, as a father loves a son or daughter. He has a people whom he has blessed with all spiritual blessings. He has a people whom he has chosen before the foundation of the world. He has a people whom he has predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself,

according to the good pleasure of his will. Those people, and those alone are able to say, "He hath made us accepted in the beloved."

Not all have experienced this special love of God. "The love of Jesus, what it is, None but his loved ones know." Jesus has a people whom he especially loves in a way he does not love the world in general. The world in general knows nothing of that love. Samuel Rutherford, one of the Westminster Divines, wrote in 1636, "His love is a mystery to the world."

This love is called God's electing love. This love is a particular love. It is no comfort for the ^{Church, The} Bride of Christ to be told, "Of course Christ loves you. He loves everybody." No. His bride wants to hear the voice of her Beloved say to her and to her alone, "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." Christ loves his bride as he loves no one else. He died, not for the world in general, but for his bride in particular. It is for this reason that Paul commands, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." ^{also Acts 20:28 "The church of God which he has purchased with his own blood."} Christ gave himself for the church in particular, not for the world in general. It is to His bride in particular that he says, "This is my body broken for you."

But you may be saying, "That's unfair." Is it unfair that a husband should love his wife exclusively? Is it unfair that he should give his bride such tokens of his love which he gives to no one else? Is it unfair for a man or woman to chose whomsoever they will to adopt as their child and pass over others? Is it any comfort to be told that your husband loves you because he loves everybody?

Sometimes a husband will wonder why his wife ever married him. Sometimes we are surprised when we hear of a couple getting married. We say, "I can't believe he is marrying her." And so it is with those whom God has chosen from all eternity for his own. He choses without any regard to anything in themselves. He choses them when they are dead in sin. He choses them when they are still hostile to him. He does not chose them because he foresees that they will trust him because he knows that apart from his electing love they will never trust him. He does not chose them because he foresees that some will seek him because he knows that apart from his electing love there are none that seek him, no, not one. If it were not for God's electing love there would be none who would come to him. Christ would have no bride were it not for his electing love.

When a person experiences that electing love of God he

or she cannot help but ask,

"Why should He love me, a sinner undone?
 Why? tell me, why should He care?
 I do not merit the love He has shown--
 Why? tell me, why should He care.
 All my iniquities on Him were laid--
 He nailed them all to the tree.
 Jesus the debt of my sin fully paid--
 He paid the ransom for me."

What a great and awesome mystery this is. The mystery of God's electing love will never be known to us in this ~~love~~^{world}.

A couple years ago I got toggether with some friends from high school. We had all gone to the same little Presbyterian church in Newark, Delaware. I related to them how as a high-school student I would listen with rapt attention, in fear and trembling, to the minister Sunday after Sunday. He seemed to speak to me in particular. I felt as though he had been watching me throughout the week and knew my every movement. He seemed to know the things I had been thinking. He was able to name the very fears and doubts I was experiencing. I would tremble in the pew because he spoke to me in particular. I was certain, in fact, that his eyes focused on me alone when he ppeached.

When I related this to my friends they were amazed. They could recall no such experience and had not found what he said very memorable. They had been there. They had heard the same words that I heard, but those words did not speak

to them as they did to me. Then it was I understood that it was not so much the minister as it was the Lord himself who had been speaking to me. It was as though week after week the Lord had come to me saying, "Ted, I know all about you. I know your thoughts. I know your doubts. I know your sins. I know your weaknesses. I know your fears. I know all about you but I still love you. I love you. Do you believe that? I love you in particular. I want you to know that I love you in a special way, in a way that I do not love the world in general. I have loved you from before the foundation of the world. Do you believe that?"

~~"My Beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."~~ It was God's electing love. It was God's lovingkindness that drew me to Christ irresistably, but willingly and eagerly, like a moth to a candle. I knew then what Hosea meant when he wrote of the Lord, "I drew them... with bands of love."

How many of you know what I'm talking about? ~~Am I making any sense?~~ Have you become infatuated with Christ? Have you begun to fall in love with him? Do you feel the chords of his love drawing you to himself to trust him and to believe him and to embrace him as he freely offers himself to you? Do you

Thos. Watson, ?

love Christ? "Love is quick in hearing the voice that is loved." The other evening ^{my wife} Kay went to a meeting and I put ^{our 2 year old son} Andrew to bed without his mother's hug and kiss. ~~She~~ Kay came in hours later, very quietly, so as not to waken the boys

^{but} Andrew was quick to hear her. "Love is quick in hearing the voice that is loved." He quickly ^{He was alert to hear the voice he loves} got out of bed to come to his mother for a good-night hug and kiss. ^ Do you love Christ?

"Love is quick in hearing the voice that is loved."

May Christ speak to you this morning. ^{May you} ~~And when he~~ ^{hear the voice of your beloved saying, "Rise up, my love, my} ~~speaks those gentle words, "This is my body, broken for you.~~ ^{fair one}

~~This is my blood, poured out for you,"~~ then may your hearts ^{embrace the head Jesus Christ in} be awakened and may you ~~cry out in your hearts, "The voice~~ ^{firm,} ~~of my beloved!"~~

AMEN.