

## *Scriptures*

*Psalms 34:1-8*

*Isaiah 63:7-9*

*Romans 12:9-18*

*Luke 2:41-52*

## *Message*

### *Love Takes Root*

The first Sunday of a new year is always a quiet day. The celebrations have passed. The calendar has turned. And many of us arrive a little tired – not just from the holidays, but from the year that now sits behind us.

And it's often in that quieter, more honest space – when we're tired enough to stop pretending – that deeper questions begin to surface. Not loud questions. Not ones we rush to answer. But the kind we carry quietly.

Questions like this: *Is God really as forgiving as we say?*

Not as a theological claim. Not as something we print in a bulletin or sing in a hymn. But as something real enough to trust when life gets complicated.

The days after Christmas have a way of doing that – pulling us out of celebration and back into ordinary life, where forgiveness is no longer an idea but a need.

The Bible doesn't answer that question with a definition. It answers it with a picture. A picture of a God who doesn't stay above the pain, but steps into it. A God who is not only aware of human struggle, but affected by it.

There's a line in scripture that says, *"In all their distress, God was distressed too."* (Isaiah 63:9) That's not a distant God. That's not a conditional God. That's a God whose love moves toward us, even when the story is messy.

Which means forgiveness doesn't begin with our repentance. It begins with God's presence.

That kind of love doesn't ask us to understand everything right away. It invites us to experience it. "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

Not *figure it out*. Not *get it right*. Taste. See.

Which suggests that forgiveness isn't something we master. It's something we slowly come to trust. Especially when fear creeps in.

Because if we're honest, fear is often what keeps us from believing forgiveness is real. Fear that we've gone too far. Fear that we should know better by now. Fear that grace has limits, even if we never say so out loud.

But the love we meet in Christ is not frightened off by fear. It stays.

That's what we see in the story of Jesus after Christmas.

No angels. No manger. Just a family on a long journey home — tired, distracted, human.

They lose track of Jesus. And the story doesn't rush past that. It lets the anxiety sit there. It lets the fear breathe.

When Mary finally finds her son, she speaks honestly. Not reverently. Not politely. Honestly.

And what follows is not punishment or shame, but conversation. Relationship. Time.

The story ends not with everything resolved, but with something quieter and more realistic: growth.

Jesus grows. Mary treasures. Life continues.

That's forgiveness taking root — not erasing the moment, but holding it long enough for wisdom to grow.

This is the love Paul is talking about when he writes about love that is genuine — not pretend, not performative, not rushed. Love that shows up. Love that practices patience. Love that blesses instead of retaliates. Love that does the hard work of staying in relationship.

And notice what Paul doesn't say. He doesn't say, *Live this way so God will love you*. He assumes love has already been given. This kind of life doesn't earn forgiveness. It grows out of it.

So when we asks, *Is God really as forgiving as we say?* the answer is not, *Yes, because the Bible says so*.

The answer is, *Yes, because God keeps showing up*. Yes, because love keeps choosing presence over distance. Yes, because forgiveness doesn't run out when the season ends.

And yes – because this love is not fragile.

That's when God's love shows its strength – shining even in the face of death, and refusing to let death have the final word.

That's the promise that stretches from the manger to the empty tomb, even if we don't name Easter yet.

And that love does not stay contained in the stories we read in Scripture. It takes root.

It takes root in ordinary lives, often in moments that never make the headlines – in people who are tired, in situations that are imperfect, in relationships where patience is tested.

On Christmas Day, my son Daniel was already dealing with intense back pain and migraines. Even so, he took on the job of mounting a new TV for his oldest son and a computerized boxing trainer for his younger son, Aiden.

The TV went up without trouble. But when Daniel turned to the boxing trainer, he quickly realized that Aiden had already tried to install it himself – using up and damaging all the Velcro fasteners in the process.

Daniel's response stayed with me. There was no explosion of anger. No lecture. Just a pause – almost a recognition of how predictable this was – followed by a quiet, steady truth: "I asked you not to do that."

And then – still in pain, still tired – Daniel went ahead and figured out how to make it work. He adjusted. He improvised. He got the trainer mounted on the wall.

I've wondered what that moment felt like for Aiden. He knew he had messed up. He knew he hadn't listened. And instead of being shamed or shut out, he watched his dad stay with him, solve the problem, and finish the work.

It wasn't a dramatic moment of forgiveness. No speeches. No declarations. Just love choosing not to turn away. Correction held together with care. Forgiveness wrapped inside patience.

That's how love takes root – in people who keep learning how to forgive, how to stay, how to live with one another honestly and gently.

Not because we are finished products. But because God's love has decided to live among us.

As a new year begins, we are not asked to have everything figured out. We are not asked to be finished products. We are invited to trust that grace is already here – working quietly, making room for growth, taking root where we are willing to stay.

And perhaps that is how Christ still comes among us – not loudly or perfectly, but quietly and patiently, as love takes root in ordinary lives.

Thanks be to God. Amen.