



Up Close and Personal

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" (John 20:19).

Every spring God presents an elaborately orchestrated pageant. Every spring God's creation bursts into life, unabashedly reminding us of God's matchless, unbounded love for us. Every spring things on earth and things in heaven harmoniously join together to refresh our memory that Jesus is, not just was.

Every spring, new life emerges from a seemingly barren earth. Everywhere we see evidence that God is working, he is alive, he is coming near. Hope is in the air.

Spring is a busy time—its first festivity is the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord. The dance of spring continues when we pay tribute to our earthly mothers and fathers, when we attend weddings and when we observe the anniversaries of those same weddings. As spring begins to yield to summer we celebrate the birth of the body of Christ, his church.

Spring is also a time of graduation, which as students and professors know, is not the end, but the beginning—a commencement of something new and fresh. Spring is the time when all students, of all ages, look forward to the summer "break", for the time when, as the old rock n' roll anthem triumphantly declares, "school's out for the summer." Spring is a time when a young man's heart turns to...baseball...and, of course, it's a time when everyone's heart turns to *love*.

Love. If love is anything at all, it is all about relationship. It is all about how we feel and what we do and how we act and behave *in relation* to the object of our love and affection. Love is about intimacy, about coming near, about being together, about getting *up close and personal*.

But, in case you haven't noticed it yet, human love is fickle. Unlike God's unchanging love, a love that he reminds us of in sacred covenant every spring, human love is filled with imperfections and uncertainties. Human love is imperfect because of its imperfect source. Apart from God, human relationships are always subject to change, expanding or contracting, growing more intense or growing stale. Because of human imperfection, human love can be elusive and unrequited.

The quest for human love, in spite of heroic and exacting efforts, can often be beyond our reach, and in the end the search for love can be painful. Our efforts to come near to another human can fail, because in the end, apart from God, human love is based on human effort alone.

God's love is completely unlike any human love we can ever receive or give. God's love is perfect, it can never fail. He loves us *because of who he is*, rather than what we do or fail to do.

One spring day the Lamb of God demonstrated the ultimate manifestation of his love, the final, complete, once and for all total commitment of his love on his cross. Then, Easter morning, the Light of this world erupted from the tomb, victorious over death, our greatest enemy. New Life, in the person of the risen Lord, exploded out of a place of death and grief.

The death of the Lamb, and his triumphant resurrection, was the plan from the very beginning (Revelation 13:8). In the beginning, God composed a magnificent annual spring symphony, so that all of nature would join together in a majestic dance, proclaiming his *up close and personal* love for us. The spring is a love song God has written just for you, in the recurring spiritual and physical spring-times of your life, to tell you that he is alive and near, and that he will always be there for you, stretching out his arms, welcoming and embracing you.

If you've experienced...

Religion gone Wild...

AND...If you've experienced
GOD'S AMAZING GRACE...

Tell us your story

Tell us how legalism had you trapped and how grace saved you.

Tell us how you were held as a spiritual captive and how Jesus Christ released you from that captivity.

Plain Truth is preparing a major story about real people whose lives were a mess, who had been spiritually mugged and abused... and about how God intervened and rescued them, by his grace.

We are looking for stories about the good—God's amazing grace—and we are looking for contrasting stories of the bad and ugly—religious legalism and all of its contrivances.

If you were lost and God's grace found and rescued you, we want to hear from you!

If you are a survivor of RELIGION GONE WILD, **we want to hear from you!**

Write to us at:

Plain Truth Ministries

Pasadena, CA 91129

or email us at

managing.editor@ptm.org



**PLAIN TRUTH
MINISTRIES**

commentary

God's love is real, not just an emotional feeling. God's *up close and personal* love is not some pie-in-the-sky Pollyanna-like feel-good notion that pious religious do-gooders have conjured up. Jesus is not merely some historical footnote existing on some dusty library shelf. Jesus is not a nice memory in a theological scrapbook no-one ever looks at, but he is risen, alive, existing in the present now-ness of our lives. Jesus is, not just was.

My wife Karen and I recently spent a day with three of our grandchildren, a day which included, in their language, a "sleep-over." At the end of the day we were seated for dinner with the two who are old enough to sit at the table. Before we ate, I asked which one of them would like to say "the prayer." Both responded in the affirmative, so, as we often do, we had two prayers before dinner.

Our 3-year-old grandson made quick work of his memorized prayer, perhaps with the thought that God surely wouldn't want us to let the food get cold. When our 5-year-old granddaughter followed with her prayer, she gave us a short, yet profound sermon about the *up close and personal* relationship she enjoys with God.

Dear God,

Thank you for a nice day we had with Nana and Poppa. I hope you had a nice day, too. Thank you for this food. I love you and you love me.

A-men.

With tears in our eyes, Karen and I thanked God that he is not just Santa Claus or the tooth fairy for our granddaughter. He is real. He is here. He is *up close and personal*. God has nice days too. God loves us and we love him. He's not mad at us. He's not way off somewhere. Jesus is, not just was. Jesus is alive, he is risen. He is here with us, forever.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples on Sunday evening, they were behind locked doors. They were living in fear. They felt incredibly vulnerable. Jesus had been killed—would they be next? Maybe

that's where you are in your life right now—vulnerable and in need.

The disciples were grieving the death of Jesus. They were undoubtedly disenchanted about the commitment they had made to Jesus but now it seemed to them that their relationship with Jesus was over. For them Jesus was past tense. Jesus was dead. They had loved and lost. In their vulnerability, they desperately needed to be assured that God was in the present tense, *up close and personal*.

C.S. Lewis speaks of the vulnerability of love, in his book *The Four Loves*. "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness."

When Jesus, "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6), appeared to his disciples on Sunday evening, he breathed his new life into them (John 20:22), transforming them from spiritual dead men walking into dynamos of the life of the risen Lord. Jesus breathed on them, transforming them into the spring time of their spiritual lives.

Jesus appeared to reassure them that he had made himself vulnerable for them and to offer tangible evidence to them that he had not abandoned them. He appeared in their midst, getting *up close and personal*. By way of greeting, he simply said to them "Peace be with you."

The word Jesus used, which we translate as peace, was *shalom*. This word conveys more than the absence of anxiety and stress—it conveys, among other things, that all is well because of God's grace and his presence in our lives.

God is with you, now and forever. God is *up close and personal*. He loves you, always has and always will. *Shalom! Peace be with you!* □

—Greg Albrecht

THE PLAIN TRUTH