

*“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, ‘God with us’.”*

Have you ever had something that you can't seem to lose?

When I was in high school, one of my friends gave me this bookmark. The friend who gave it to me was not a very close friend, and so it's not particularly special. But strangely, I can't seem to get rid of it. Actually, since high school, I've moved 10 times—I've lived in 10 different houses. But at every house, I keep finding this not-so-special bookmark.

This summer, I was looking through a box of office supplies, and I found it again! “This is crazy!” I thought, “I can't believe this little thing is still around!” Hmm... Maybe I should just throw it away?

You know, sometimes I think that the most important things in the Bible are found in the shortest sentences. One short verse in the Bible says, “God is love.” But that little phrase is packed with meaning.

Another little phrase, full of meaning, is the one we hear a lot around Christmas time. The angel tells Mary, “your son will be called Emmanuel—God with us.”

Today, I'd like you to think about these two short phrases *together*: God is love, *and* God was with us. This means that, in Jesus Christ, perfect love came to live among people.

If you remember your Bible classes, you'll remember that Jesus talked about love all the time. Love was the center of his life. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself—these are the two greatest commandments,” Jesus said. “Do not return evil for evil,” Jesus said. “If someone strikes you on one cheek, let him strike you on the other also,” he taught. “Love your enemies, and do good to those who hurt you.”

But Jesus didn't just *talk* about loving people, he actually *did* it. He hung around with Samaritans and tax collectors and prostitutes—people others wouldn't be caught dead with. He welcomed the “unclean,” he showed mercy to law-breakers, he brought the hope of a kinder and more just world to each of the people he met.

But here's the strange question—If Jesus was so good, why was he killed? Jesus didn't hurt anybody. He didn't incite rebellion. He wasn't a criminal. He insisted on only one thing--*loving God and loving your neighbor*.

The answer is this. Jesus was killed for the same reason that tragedies continue to happen over and over again in *our own* world. Jesus was killed for the same reason there are problems in Iraq and Sudan and Chechnya. Jesus was killed for the same reason that there are stabbings in school yards in Japan. Jesus was killed for the same reason that people sometimes hate each other right here on the campus of Kanto Gakuin Senior High School. *Jesus was killed because people don't know how to love each other. He was killed because people usually end up destroying love.* People *didn't* understand Jesus, and they *didn't* understand his message, simple as it was. Love came and lived among us, and people threw it away.

Sadly, we humans are exactly the same in every age. *We don't know how to love one another.* We let other things get in our way. Just think about your own life. Our inability to forgive people who have hurt us, our desire for power, our need for revenge, our need to see so-called “justice” done—all these things keep us from doing what is *most* important—simply loving other people.

Humanity's fundamental problem is not a complex problem. It's this—over and over again, we humans keep nailing love to the cross. We throw it away. We think that love is not really that necessary. We think that love is an *extra*—something nice to give to a few, carefully selected people, every now and then, when we feel like it. And for that fatal mistake, our world bleeds day after day.

But you know what? Just like this little bookmark, love is also something we humans can't seem to get rid of. Mysteriously, *it keeps coming back.* Again, one short passage of the Bible contains tremendous meaning. Listen to Peter's simple words to a crowd gathered in Jerusalem, “This same Jesus who you killed, God has raised from the dead” (Acts 2:32).

What does this mean—Jesus' resurrection? To me, Jesus' resurrection is one of the most beautiful symbols in the world. If we remember that God is love, and the Jesus was God's love with us, it's clear that Jesus' resurrection is a powerful sign that God *won't allow* humans to destroy love.

We can turn our backs on love, *but we cannot kill it.* Humans couldn't kill Jesus! We can't kill Jesus precisely because we can't kill love. *Humans cannot destroy it.* We can ignore it. We can forget about it. We can think that other things are more important than it. We can temporarily lose sight of it. *But we cannot get rid of it.* God keeps bringing it back to life.

Humans oppress each other, and hate each other and hurt each other—that's the reality we live in. But for every act of hate and oppression, there will arise a Martin Luther King, Jr. or a Mother Theresa. Humans make war. But for every war, there will arise a whole sea of protesters crying for peace. Humans can kill and wound and intimidate each other, but for every terrible act of hatred, there will always arise a

ground-swell of disgust and regret. Humans can fall victim to terrible natural disasters, but in every time of disaster, people will appear to help and heal their fellow man.

Why? Because of the truth of Jesus' resurrection. Because *we can't get rid of love*. Just like I can't get rid of this silly bookmark, we can't get rid of the God who has come. We *can't* lose him. We *can't* get away from him.

In your own life, you may have times when you feel terribly depressed—times when you feel like the world is ending and that no one who cares about you. But in times like these, there too, stands the resurrected Christ—the Christ who cannot be killed. There stands this eternal thing called love. God has remained in the world as love, not just for the good of humankind in general, but also to comfort, heal and empower *you*, in particular.

This is why Christmas is important, even today. That Jesus came into the world is not just a historical fact. It's a present reality. God has come to us! Love has come for us! And, as much as we try, nothing we could ever do could separate us from that love.

I hope you can sense that today because it's the most important thing in the world. If you understand that, you have not only understood Christmas, you have come very close to the kingdom of God.