

This may sound immature, but I bet you'd agree with me that there is nothing as exhilarating - and frustrating - as having a crush on someone who doesn't know it. It's an experience that is unlike any other – all at one time, you feel excited and tingling with life – but if it's one-sided, you feel invisible, rejected, unacceptable, and ready to crawl into a hole someplace.

Do you remember how this feels?

I do.

I can remember the thrill I felt each time I saw the boy I currently had a crush on – it didn't matter what he wore or where he was, the feeling was the same each time. The boy always seemed to emit an aura of some kind in my mind – he was funnier, cuter, smarter or more talented than anyone else, and he could do no wrong.

Each boy I had a crush on was the perfect boy of my dreams – the only problem was, nearly all the time, the “boy du jour” didn't really know I cared – too often, he was one of the popular guys at my school, and he was out of reach to someone like me who tended to be more of a pal than a girlfriend.

That didn't stop me from trying to get his attention, though!

I can remember spending many a day mooning over some guy, secretly wishing he'd just look at me, inventing clever conversations between us, imagining tender moments that would never happen, writing his name in curly letters on the margins of my papers in school. If I really liked the boy, I would write, “Mrs. So-and-so” on my papers – then I'd crumble them up and stuff them in my notebook so no one else could see.

I can remember planning my wardrobe each day, hoping that some magical combination of outfits would display me in such a way that he would notice and, even better, ask me out because I was so irresistible.

I can remember writing notes that I never passed, declaring my love, and then asking the timeless question carefully printed out with little boxes drawn alongside the choices at the end of these heartfelt communications: “I really like you – do you like me? Check one box: Yes or No - and give it back.”

When you have a crush on someone, you forget to be sensible, you forget your obligations, you do anything you can think of to show that person you love them without telling them who's behind the love. You become consumed with the idea of being in love. Sometimes it's reciprocated – mostly, it's not.

Well, I have to tell you that if I didn't know better, I'd say that God has a serious crush on us.

Think about it – God's trying to get our attention.

Didn't God create an amazing cosmos for us to live in, and a glorious earth to live on?

Didn't God provide for all of our physical, emotional and spiritual needs?

Didn't God send us Jesus – God's own version of the "I really like you – do you like me?" note?
Check one: Yes or No – and give it back.

Didn't God create a Spirit of Love to quietly sneak inside each of our souls, to touch our hearts and cause us to feel warm and accepted – even when we don't realize or deserve it?

And, as Paul in our Scripture for today so eloquently puts it, didn't God give us the freedom to be our true selves so we could serve others through this amazing love God provides?

"Love others as you love yourself" – how simple – how profound – how impossible this love is!

Yes, I'd say God has a huge crush on us – or God wouldn't be so generous, so patient and so consistent with our self-centered actions and our inability to return the depth and scope of this crush. God must be crazy about us, because God overlooks our weaknesses – and when it seems we are too "into" ourselves to the extent that we lose focus on what's true and just - God provides an "out" through the sacrifice of a much-loved Son that takes away all sin and keeps us with God.

Today, I chose The Message version of our Scripture because it gives a real-life, gritty description of what we humans are like when we are at our worst. Paul is driving home a huge point to the Galatians, and he wants to be sure they understand that a life without God through Jesus is dark with human shortcomings. Listen to this passage:

It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on. This isn't the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God's kingdom.

It seems to me, too often we act like those popular kids who are used to being adored – who take for granted the whole notion that someone will always love them because they are more talented, cuter and/or smarter than everyone else. We humans forget how to be humble in the face of such a crush – and we misuse our freedom – sometimes even in the name of God. We take advantage of the One who would do anything for us – we choose to satisfy our own needs first, or act out in defiance of what we know we should do - and disregard the Figure waiting in the background who just wants us to return that Holy Love and check the "Yes" box in the note.

But God, through Jesus and the Spirit, often looks the other way and waits for us to come to our senses...God still sees the good in us, pitiful and willful as we are. God has time and resources to bring us back – we are so lucky and blessed that God is willing to hang around until we "get it." God has nothing to lose because some day, we might decide we feel the same way – and when that happens, as Paul said, all parts of our lives change for the good – and we see the absolute value of accepting God's amazing love. We become whole beings, living for one another and God, working to bring fullness to everyone's life because of our love of and from God.

In our Hannah Circle group, we've been reading a book called, "The Ragamuffin Gospel" by Brennan Manning. Manning knows from his own life experience how big a crush God has on us – long ago, he woke up one morning in the doorway of a city building, drunk and shoeless – a priest full of shame – alone, unloved, unloving. He surrendered his self-centered life to God through Jesus, and most of his writings speak of the freedom of letting go – of accepting personal weakness and looking to God for the truth and strength – of accepting that Holy, all-consuming Love in the form of Jesus Christ.

In a chapter where he describes how valuable it is for us to have "tilted halos," to have NEED for God's love through Jesus – and to accept God's unconditional love - the closing remarks hit a nerve with me, and so I share them with you. From "The Ragamuffin Gospel" ...

"The question the gospel of grace puts to us is simply this: Who shall separate you from the Love of Christ? What are you afraid of?"

Are you afraid that your weakness could separate you from the love of Christ? It can't.

Are you afraid that your inadequacies could separate you from the love of Christ? They can't.

Are you afraid that your inner poverty could separate you from the love of Christ? It can't.

Difficult marriage, loneliness, anxiety over the children's future? They can't.

Negative self-image? It can't.

Economic hardship, racial hatred, street crime? They can't.

Rejection by loved ones or the suffering of loved ones? They can't.

Persecution by authorities, going to jail? They can't.

Nuclear war? It can't.

Mistakes, fears, uncertainties? They can't.

The gospel of grace calls out, Nothing can ever separate you from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You must be convinced of this, trust it, and never forget to remember. Everything else will pass away, but the love of Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Faith will become vision, hope will become possession, but the love of Jesus Christ is stronger than death and endures forever.

In the end, it's the one thing you can hang onto.

God has such a crush on us, God is so consumed with Holy Love, that God gave us Jesus and the hope of eternal life. There is nothing that can take this Holy Love away, and nothing we can do to earn it, but as Paul told the Galatians, we must work to honor the memory of Jesus and God's Love - and live wisely - and openly - our love in response.

Go ahead. Check the "Yes" box, and return it - full-force. Amen.