

Most of us have probably seen tee shirts that read Golf Rules, Lacrosse Rules, Music Rules, Poetry Rules, Cats Rule. In fact, some members of our community are wearing those shirts now! People wear these shirts because they love that activity or pet. It rules—has a high priority in their lives and is life-giving to them.

When we look at today's gospel from Luke, what is it that rules? We have people watching, rulers and soldiers mocking, criminals speaking with and without remorse. Jesus' cross reads "This is the King of the Jews" yet the only words Jesus says are to the remorseful criminal—"The truth is, today you'll be with me in paradise!" For this "king" Love rules. Even on the edge of death Jesus enfleshes what God's reign is really about—a kin-ship, a connection, a being-with—a reign of the heart that is always Love.

Whether it is a moment of celebration or pain, an ordinary time or an unusual one, an experience of quiet or seeming nothingness, God's Love rules. Let's consider some examples that bring this reign of Love to life.

The 1<sup>st</sup> illustration occurs during celebration and uncertainty. Recently our daughter's friends had a baby, a wonderful event to celebrate! Parker, though, was 2 months premature and was in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for over 2 months. They almost lost him a few times. However, advanced technology, the high level care of the medical staff, and the prayerful support of so many helped Parker progress and he is now home. Throughout that stressful and uncertain time God's kin-ship was enfleshed in all who supported Parker and his family. Love ruled throughout his time in the hospital and now as they celebrate his life at home.

As a second example, God's Love also reigns in happy times. Last weekend when Stan and I visited our daughter Dayna and her husband James, they treated us to a day at the Renaissance Festival. This was a reign of laughter from the moment we entered the fair. The

people were completely in character, and we laughed ourselves silly at an incredible juggling performance, amazing balancing acts, and jousting that combined skill and comedy. We enjoyed bread bowls and caramel apples and lively banter with the bartender and the people around us. There also were several musicians. One accomplished violinist lying on the ground tried to tap into my pastoral skills as he said: "Comfort me, my lady!" As I laughed and continued walking, I stretched out my hand and said: "Be comforted!" It wasn't quiet the handhold he was hoping for, but we were all in stitches! I have no doubt God was touching us throughout our good time there. Our laughter created endorphins beyond counting, and our hearts felt light, happy, and connected. Love ruled.

A third example centers around the ministry of Helen Prejean, a Sister of St. Joseph who wrote *Dead Man Walking*, an internationally acclaimed book about application of the death penalty. She has companioned people on death row and also ministers to victims' families. In a later essay which appears in the book *Holiness and The Feminine Spirit*, which Kathy Schuck gave me, Helen describes the case where Lloyd LeBlanc's teenage son was killed by Patrick Sonnier and his brother. Lloyd said: "I prayed and prayed not to hate...I decided: they killed my boy but I'm not going to let them kill me. If I hate, I'll be dead, too." Helen Prejean said that Lloyd LeBlanc walked the long road of forgiveness, "God's grace met him on that road, and he forgave the men who killed his son." (p. 79) Lloyd chose to love in the midst of overwhelming grief and stark emptiness. Christ reigned in his heart. His son's killer Patrick Sonnier eventually admitted his heinous crime and was deeply remorseful. When it was time for his execution, Helen Prejean told Patrick: "Look at my face. I will be the face of Christ for you." (p. 80) Because Love reigned in Helen Prejean's heart, she was able to help Patrick come to terms with his crime and his fear; he finally felt Love. In walking this utterly painful path, Lloyd LeBlanc,

Caryl Conroy Johnson

Patrick Sonnier, and Helen Prejean were transformed and Christ's Love reigned supreme.

Several years ago I had the privilege of hearing Helen Prejean speak at nearby Eastern University. I felt first-hand God's palpable Love through her authenticity, humility, and deep conviction. Her presence embodied the kin-ship of God.

The last illustration I'd like to share is about our Mary Magdalene Community. Although we are lovers of sports, the arts, and animals, there is so much more love that rules here. I think that 2 words sum up this love: graciousness and spaciousness. There is a graciousness that welcomes and accepts. a graciousness that invites others into ministry or other events. a graciousness that comforts and companions. a graciousness that is generous in giving and exudes joy. There is also a spaciousness that allows people to be who they are and to question and explore their faith. a spaciousness that offers freedom to walk a path without knowing the final destination. a spaciousness that encourages others to plant seeds without knowing how they'll grow. a spaciousness that is willing to cross boundaries and share in the richness of other faith traditions. Thank you for living this graciousness and spaciousness, for being the body of Christ and allowing God's love to reign through you.

These 4 experiences of uncertainty, laughter, tragedy, and community illustrate the deep kin-ship of God. To help heighten our awareness of God's presence, I encourage you to take a quiet moment each day to contemplate the questions: How has God's love reigned in me today? How have I felt God's love around me?

I'd like to leave you with an excerpt from *Love Poems from God*. It is entitled "What is Grace?" by 16<sup>th</sup> Century mystic John of the Cross. (p. 321)

"What is grace?" I asked God.  
And God said,  
"All that happens."

Then God added, when I looked perplexed,  
“Could not lovers  
say that every moment in their Beloved’s arms was grace?  
Existence is my arms.”

Feel God’s arms holding you now and in whatever circumstance you find yourself. For in all  
things—Love Rules.

*Scripture Readings—Feast of Christ the King*

2 Samuel 5: 1-3

Colossians 1: 12-20

Luke 23: 35-43