

**The Peculiar Community**  
**I John 4:7-12**

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The first time I met Daisy she was a guest in our house. Actually it was Kathy who invited her because she knew already her. Being the big-hearted guy I am I said that sure, Daisy can stay with us a while. But how long? A day or two at the most. Well, okay, that doesn't sound too bad.

As it goes that couple of days stretched into several, though not quite a week. And here is the unvarnished truth: You can't like everybody and I didn't like Daisy. She was messy, too nervous and jittery and just, well, she got into my space, didn't know her boundaries. I counted the days, sometimes the minutes when I could wave goodbye to Daisy.

But that was back then and later we had the opportunity to go over to Daisy's apartment to visit. There she was, but now in her own environment.

I should tell you that Daisy has a roommate and they share the apartment together. Like two peas in the same pod they are.

So one day Daisy and her roommate are sitting on their couch and gushing about how they like each other and I thought to myself that I can't stand two more minutes of this sentimentality. But then her roommate went on to tell a story about Daisy and that changed everything for me. What she told was the story of the first day she met Daisy.

What happened is that Daisy's roommate went over to an animal rescue center one day on a mission. She told the staff that she wanted the dog that nobody else wanted. And so they took her to the cage of exactly that dog, the one nobody wanted. Because of that the dog wouldn't be long for this world because it was not a no-kill shelter.

To take one look at that dog was to know why it was always passed over. It looked like an overgrown rat, panted and huffed and whined and jumped all over you.

The dog was so eager to get some kind of love that it made the perpetual nuisance of itself. It drooled and ran around and made the place a mess. I would have never picked that dog. But she did.

She told the staff that she wanted that dog, the unwanted one. And when she asked the name of the dog he said, "Daisy. We named this one Daisy."

"Good enough," said Daisy's roommate, and she took Daisy home with her that very day.

The thing is that Daisy's roommate had a debilitating stroke in middle adulthood, a stroke that just took about everything that can be taken from a person – mobility and a career and dreams of a normal way of life and freedom. It snatched her life right out of her hands.

If you can imagine that just for a moment you might begin to comprehend how utterly depressed a person can become when they drop into that deep dark hole. You don't want to go on living. There isn't much to live *for*.

The thing is Daisy crawled down into that deep, dark hole with her. And the rat dog nobody wanted became her companion and a touch of sanity in the storm. "I saved Daisy and then Daisy saved me." That's how she put it and that's how it is.

If you think about it a community of two is about the smallest community you can have. It may be a peculiar community, this coalition of two, this gathering from two species, a chosen relationship of convenience or necessity. But that is not what really makes it so peculiar.

It is peculiar because they saved other and continue to save each other. You might not know that from the outside like I didn't know it.

The Good and Beautiful Community is one characterized by partners who have been saved from the jaws of despair and then saved others in turn.

We are told that other-giving love is only reliable marker by which you can know if God is hanging

around a community of faith, by the way they love one another. Everything else is just window dressing. When people fall in love with God because they know God has come a courting, they start falling in love with just about everyone and everything thing around them. That's how you know it's all real.

Of course, that's what we say should define life in the Spirit, life in Christian community. We hear the description right in I John 4:11-12: "Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. <sup>13</sup>By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."

As I look back over the years and think of the Christian communities of which I have been a part, and compare them to the image of Daisy and her roommate, how do they size up?

Well, they size up very unevenly. I would have to say that some congregations reflect that kind of love

more than others. And some people in some congregations reflect that love more or less than others. And some congregations go through phases in which they more or less reflect that kind of love.

Regardless of the season in life or place or people, that is still the goal, that kind of loving. Why? Because it reflects God and God makes it possible in the first place. You know that. And you know it when you see it, feel it.

One of my favorite books (and movie based on it) is *The Life of Pi* (Yann Martel). In the beginning of the young man's story he is in his native India on a vacation with his parents near a lush tea plantation. While they are there he becomes curious about a Christian church sitting on one of the adjoining hills. Slowly but surely he investigates the church and finally gets up enough courage to talk with the kindly priest. In fact, he meets with the priest for several days in a row, all the while asking about this strange God-man called Jesus.

You see, the Hinduism of Pi was full of the glory and infinity of the sacred cosmos already. The stories of his youth led him to revere every created thing in the cosmos, to understand it as holy. But now in a certain twist of his fate Lord Krishna has led him to Jesus.

He is amazed that God could show up in such concrete humanity, walk the ways of ordinary people, tell them stories and riddles of truth, and then end up being vilified by the same humanity he went to save. And he asks the priest, over and over, why this way? Why would God care this much? Why would God be humbled this much? Why would he die like millions of others? Why so concrete in one place and time?

“That was how I met that troublesome rabbi of long ago: with disbelief and annoyance.”(56)

And to every one of Pi’s questions about this strange way to encounter the world, Father Martin simply replied “love.” The answer was always the same, love. That’s why in every case.

Before Pi had to leave he visited Father Martin one last time and he told him that he like to be a Christian. And Father Martin said “You already are ... in your heart. Whoever meets Christ in good faith is a Christian.”(57)

The answer to the motives and methods of the peculiar God is always *love*. And the thing that characterizes the peculiar community who has been taken captive to this Jesus is *also* love.

In the same way that Daisy and her roommate seem odd until you know their story, how they saved one another, and story of Jesus seems the oddest of the odd until you know it is propelled by love, so the Christian community should probably seem equally odd until you realize what is on the inside of it. Then – just like Daisy and just like Pi – the allure of life together should be magnetic, the something that keeps drawing you back even though you are not sure why. “She saved me and then I saved her” should be the regular story we hear all the time. And the explanation for Jesus’ life and why we are his followers should rest on the footing of love.

The normal story that makes Christian community so peculiar and Christians peculiar is that they are shaped not by the norms that make the world go 'round so much as the love that makes the impossible possible.

That, of course, is a much different story and more interesting one. When you see it in real life you know it's real and you want to be a part of it. And if the church isn't this side of peculiar it probably should be, but not odd just for the sake of being odd. The church should be peculiar because it lives in a story you don't find in the rough and tumble of dog-eat-dog life. And Jesus is the lead singer in this alternative band.