**[1]** Sermon Title: Unfailing Love
Scripture: Psalm 130:5-8
Theme: To abide in the Spirit of Christmas, let us abide in the vine of love, trust and grace, realizing that all three are beyond our understanding and our deserving

**[2]** It is love that grabs and holds us.  It is love that pushes us away.  In the world of
tennis, ‘love’ is a score of zero, a baseline below which none can fall, signifying
we are loved even if we fail. Sometimes, love can be very sentimental, a romantic
cliché. Like the silly words from the 1970’s movie *Love Story*, starring Ali
McGraw and Ryan O’Neal, “love is never having to say you’re sorry.” Would that
we all were more than ready to say ‘I’m sorry,’ if it would change our world.
Just say it. It’s not about the frailty of our egos. Other times, however, love is
heroic, giving all for country or nation, giving all for our family, giving all for our
team. The United States gave the medal of honor to three such heroes of the War in
Afghanistan. Such love is not sentimental, but real, as real as the lives of the
thousands (58, 318++) of names on the Vietnam Veteran’s Wall.

**[3**] Yes, love is a baseline. It is also a destination. Love is as real as it gets. This is how
we know God exists, that God is the most real of all realities, because God is Love
(1 John 4:16). The greatest testimony for God is that there is no “greater love than
this, laying down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13). Such love is never
sentimental, but as real as it gets.

**[4]** There is a song on Andrea Bocelli’s *my Christmas* album entitled “I Believe.” The
lyrics go like this:

“One day I'll hear, The laugh of children, In a world where war has been banned
One day I'll see, [people] of all colors, Sharing words of love and devotion
Stand up and feel, The Holy Spirit, Find the power of your faith
Open your heart, To those who need you, In the name of love and devotion
Yes, I believe,
I believe in the people, Of all nations, To join and to care, For love
I believe in a world, Where light will guide us, And giving our love, We'll make heaven on earth
Yes, I believe”

Truly, “we know we have passed from death to life because we love one another (1
John 2:14). This is the essence of believing, the power of faith, that we are known
for our love and that we know others through that love. Love is a 70x7 proposition
that never ends. Love is the more excellent way of all ways.

In today’s psalm, the poet is pleading with God from the depths of chaos, hanging
by a thread over deep waters. The poet has no firm ground on which to stand and is
staring into the jaws of death without a ready plan of escape. The poet faces an

encounter of the type for which there is no preparation. This p salm is a model for
any person of faith facing a life-shattering crisis. Truth is, that those who believe in
the Promise of God always have a place to stand; the abundant mercy of God
guarantees it. It is the promise of unfailing love that provides hope even though
circumstances seem hopeless. God creates a way where there is no way. It is never
too late to plead with God for a fresh start to life and to love.

**[5]** The Psalmist claims no right to forgiveness, no deserving past on which to base
consideration. The psalmist has no arrogant claims upon God, no debt that God
must re-pay. It is rather the opposite: the psalmist is totally dependent on God’s
grace.

“If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand?” (Ps. 130:3). The
psalmist acknowledges a truth about divine love, that Paul passes on to the
Corinthian Church, that love never keeps a list of wrongs (1 Cor 13:5). If we
imitate that love, we will not take an accounting of injuries in our relationships
with others or with God. In fore-giveness, we give space beforehand for whatever
may occur in the future, simply because we know that God loves us and would do
the same on our behalf. Our plea for mercy is never divorced from our confession
and repentance. Our golden ticket is Christ, the love of God offered to us without
conditions, in which God has pre-decided our fate based on our acceptance of, and
response to, that love.

**[6]** God repeatedly has brought us back from the edge to a fullness of love and will do
so again. Waiting upon God to act has no timeline for completion; only a belief
that it will happen over- and-over again, when we least expect it, or when we need
it the most. Love is not pre-emptive, based on distrust and doubt, or love based on
the principle of deterrence. Love anticipates trust. Love goes the second mile and
does not shut off at the first mile (Mt 5:41). Love extends beyond requited love,
beyond only those who love us, or only those who will return our love. Love is
above the consideration of profit or loss. Love ignores the call for revenge. Love
has the audacity to prepare a table in the presence of enemies (Ps. 23). Love invites
strangers to partake with the community, indeed invites them to the head of the
table (Mt 20:16). In so doing, we welcome Jesus.

Love does not crave the power to dominate but seeks the power to persuade. Love
does not rejoice in systems that dehumanize or degrade others; Love rejoices in the
right (1 Cor 13:6); love rejoices in the truth. Love does perpetuate injustice but
works against injustice. Love does not practice harm to right wrongs. Ends do not
justify means. Love is not silent in the face of evil. Love speaks truth to power.
Love calls out selfishness and rewards the selfless. Love does not just confront
racism but calls us to work against it. The same with sexism or classism or ageism,
or tribalism, or any-ism with regard to ethnicity. Love does not harbor envy or
greed but frees itself from the desire for more and more. In the material world of
things, less is more. Love’s victory comes through servanthood.

**[7]** At Christmas, love comes down from heaven to abide among us, to remove the dividing walls of hostility, to promote healing and peace. The infant child in the stable is holy precisely because he is lowly in power. The infant child rules precisely because he does not have the scepter of earthly rulers. At Christmas, love is pure. At Christmas, love is never alone. It is shared with all who believe. At Christmas, love is born. Those who are barren will give life, those who are lame will leap for joy, those who are blind will see, those who are deaf will hear, those who are mute will sing with a thousand voices, those who are unable to walk will run, those who are enslaved to the impossible are freed to the possible. Love does all things, believes all things and hopes all things. Love provides the space where we are heard before we speak, the space where we are redeemed by our listening and our waiting, the space where we are forgiven as we are pleading for forgiveness.

To abide in the Spirit of Christmas, let us abide in the vine of love, trust and grace,
realizing that all three are beyond our understanding and our deserving. Merry
Christmas! Alleluia! Amen!