

1

If you haven't purchased a Valentine's Day gift for today, it's not too late. One can always find the traditional gifts of flowers or candy, but the flowers will wilt, and the candy soon disappears. What about something that lasts longer, helping your loved one remember your love after the other items have disappeared? Maybe something handmade, showing your creative skills.

How about making a gift out of LEGOs? How many of you remember those plastic building blocks, which can be turned into just about anything? You could make a heart-shaped LEGO creation, or a rose made from building blocks. If you want to add a bit of cuteness, try building a little bear or a puppy holding a heart and flowers. They won't wilt, and they will remind your loved one each day of your creativity and love.

The current form of the LEGO blocks originated in 1958 from a company that combined two Danish words, *leg godt*, to form the name for the toy: LEGO. The Danish words mean "to play well." That's not only a good ingredient for children, but we adults need to remember how to play well, how to

be creative. Especially during times of quarantine and isolation, having creative hobbies can get us through the difficult times. It's ok to give yourself permission to play, to be creative, and Valentine's Day is a wonderful time for such an adventure.

Jesus' disciples had a different kind of adventure as they went up a mountain for prayer, and the story in Luke's Gospel even contains a hidden *lego* within the narrative, though not the traditional plastic building block.

Before we get to the *lego*, however, let's start at the beginning. Peter, James, and John climbing up a mountain with Jesus, seeking a quiet place for prayer. Maybe you've had such an experience—getting away for some quiet, listening to the sounds of nature away from the traffic, experiencing a retreat in a mountain or other majestic scene that offers a sense of awe.

While there, the three disciples fall asleep, but that seems reasonable, doesn't it? A retreat is a place to get away, an opportunity for rest, a little nap. While resting, though, they almost missed the main event, for two other people were standing with Jesus, Moses and the prophet Elijah, having a conversation about the

2

upcoming death of Jesus and how it would impact the people in the city of Jerusalem.

It must have been an amazing sight—this mystical scene, filled with light and a shadowy cloud passing overhead. Peter jumped into action and said, “How about we build three shelters, one for each of you, Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.” It’s as though he wanted to capture that moment, make it a permanent fixture there on the mountain.

I doubt that Peter was thinking of building the structure of out plastic lego building blocks, but this is the point where we discover the hidden *lego* in this story, for a voice says, “This is my *ἐκλέγομαι* [*ek·leg·om·ahee*], a Greek word with the root of *lego*. The basic root form of this word *lego* means “to say” or “to tell.” In the form that Luke uses the word, it’s often translated as “chosen one” or “my beloved.” In other words, the voice tells everyone that Jesus is his beloved.

What a wonderful message to hear, especially on this Valentine’s Day when we focus on those who are beloved to us. God has chosen Jesus, and Jesus chooses each one of us. You and I are

*ἐκλέγομαι* [*ek·leg·om·ahee*], God’s beloved ones, chosen through Jesus Christ.

Being chosen or beloved doesn’t mean we’re better than everyone else. Our chosenness isn’t due to being smarter or faster or better looking or richer or any other label we might be tempted to use to describe ourselves.

We may have a hard time understanding this idea, for when we make choices, that often means we leave out something else. We may wonder, “If God chooses me, who does God leave out?” We just can’t wrap our minds around the idea that God can choose everyone else too.

This struggle to make sense of God’s vast love is reflected in some letters that children wrote to their pastor, who invited them to send questions about God. One letter said,

“Dear Pastor: I know that God loves everybody, but he never met my sister.”

Another wrote, “Dear Pastor: I would like to bring my dog to church on Sunday. She is only a mutt, but she is a good Christian.”

3

One child seemed to have a plan to get away from his brother when he wrote, “Dear Pastor: I would like to go to heaven someday because I know my big brother won’t be there.”<sup>1</sup>

Our views of love are often quite limited, as the owner of a photographic studio discovered about a young couple. The photographer tells the story of a college boy who came in with a framed picture of his girlfriend. He wanted the picture duplicated. In removing the photograph from the frame, the studio owner noticed the inscription on the back, written by the girlfriend: “My dearest Tommy: I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I will love you forever and ever. I am yours for all eternity.” It was signed “Dianne” and contained a P.S.: “If we should ever break up, I want this picture back.”<sup>2</sup>

We might not be sure how long our love will last, but God’s love lasts forever. Some might wonder, “How can God’s love be so broad? I know that God chooses those who choose Jesus, but I wonder what happens to all those other people who are not Christian?”

The 14<sup>th</sup> century Sufi poet Hafiz describes God’s love for the world:

God was full of Wine last night,  
So full of wine

That He let a great secret slip.  
He said:

There is no man on earth  
Who needs a pardon from Me –

For there is really no such thing,  
No such thing  
As Sin!

That Beloved has gone completely Wild-He has poured  
Himself into me!

I am Blissful and Drunk and Overflowing.

Dear world,  
Draw life from my Sweet Body,

Dear wayfaring souls,  
Come drink your fill of liquid rubies,  
For God has made my heart  
An Eternal Fountain!<sup>3</sup>

In the way that Hafiz wrote about the wild love of God, surely this poet was also one of God’s beloved. It

④

seems that God tends to color outside the lines, choosing to bring beauty to all parts of the world. Even to those some may feel are outside the boundaries, God chooses them as beloved. That's the nature of God's love—it makes no boundaries. It welcomes all, chooses every one of us and even those you don't like.

On this Valentine's Day, we may choose one person to offer our love, or maybe even extend that

love to many in our family. We could never imagine, however, choosing a bouquet of flowers for everyone we know, or even for everyone we love. God, however, has a bouquet of flowers for everyone, for all are *ἐκλέγομαι* [*ek·leg·om·ahee*], God's beloved.

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<sup>1</sup> Hodgins, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #123.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., #229.

<sup>3</sup> Hafiz, *I Heard God Laughing*, rendered by Daniel Ladinsky.