In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was covered in water, covered in darkness. God said, “Let there be light,” and God saw that the light was good. God gathered the waters so the dry land appeared, and God saw that it was good. God brought forth vegetation and saw that it was good. God made the sun and the moon and the stars and saw that it was good. God made fish to swim in the waters, birds to fly in the air, and all kind of animals, from insects to mammals, to roam the earth and God saw that it was good. God created humankind. “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). Creation is inherently good. Life is inherently good.

The essence of goodness is love. The light, the water, the vegetation, the fish, the birds, the animals, humankind were all created in love. We are created in love and so, we are inspired to love. A few years back, I read a great article in Newsweek entitled Heaven is Real: A Doctor’s Experience With the Afterlife (Dr. Eben Alexander, October 8, 2012). The article is written by a neurosurgeon who had a near death experience while battling a rare bacterial meningitis. He begins the article by describing himself as an academic neurosurgeon, one who teaches at Harvard Medical School, and someone who always believed there is a scientific explanation for near-death experiences. He explains that reducing the amount of oxygen to the brain, even in a small amount, will affect the brain’s functioning and not surprisingly cause people to wake with vivid stories. However, in his case, the cortex, the part of the brain that controls thought and emotion, shut down. He writes: “There is no scientific explanation for the fact that while my body lay in coma, my mind—my conscious, inner self—was alive and well. While the neurons of my cortex [remember, the cortex controls thought and emotion – while the
neurons of my cortex] were stunned to complete inactivity by the bacteria that had attacked them, my brain-free consciousness journeyed to another, larger dimension of the universe: a dimension I’d never dreamed existed and which the old, pre-coma me would have been more than happy to explain was a simple impossibility.” This neurosurgeon now believes in consciousness after death. In the article, he describes the sights, sounds, colors and beings he encountered while traveling through this other dimension. What I want to highlight is the message he heard on this coma journey. What did he hear? He heard, “You are loved and cherished, dearly, forever.”

Life is inherently good. The essence of goodness is love. We are created in love and so, we are inspired to love. “The scribe asked Jesus, ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Our Baptismal Covenant reminds us: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? We affirm: I will, with God’s help.

We do, indeed, need God’s help, don’t we? It’s not always easy to keep our covenant with God front and center, loving our neighbor as our self. We so easily get wrapped up in our many responsibilities and activities and forget to let our faith lead, forget to let our faith shape our decision making, forget to let our faith shape our interactions with one another.

Acclaimed National Geographic photographer Dewitt Jones is inspiring. He says, “I started out in life, as most of us do, holding the maxim - - I won’t believe it, till I see it. Yet the more I worked for the Geographic the more I realized I had it backwards. That the way it really works is I won’t see it till I believe it. That’s really the way life works.” That’s how he captures the beauty in nature. He believes it is there – then he sees it – then he captures the beauty in a
photo. So, we keep on this journey. We worship and pray and reflect and gradually our faith becomes integral to our actions and our decisions. We see because we believe.

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry was on the Today Show this week talking about his new book, The Power of Love. Bishop Curry talked about how our faith is grounded in being forthright about the challenges of life, about the pains we will experience at one time or another. And, our faith is grounded in community, in supporting one another. I’m there for you when you need me; you’re there for me when I need you. We walk through life together. Curry says, the opposite of love is not hate. Hate is a derivative. The opposite of love is self-centeredness. The way of love is selflessness that seeks the good for others. The way of love is the only expression that changes life circumstances for the good. The only one.

Life is inherently good. Love turns us back towards the goodness. So, we walk through life together. When we love, we care, we listen and we learn. Let’s pray for patience. Let’s pray for true listening with open heart and mind. Let’s pray for respecting the dignity of each and every human being. Let’s pray for the desire to learn about what we don’t understand. Let’s pray for the desire to learn from those with whom we disagree. Let’s pray for productive dialogue and speaking without vitriol or divisiveness. Let us be Christ’s heart and hands and feet in this world. We are created in love and so, we are inspired to love.

The church’s calendar of saints, includes more than 300 holy women and men who we commemorate throughout the year for their faith in their service to the church and to the world. On the other hand, our hymnal includes the hymn “I sing a song of the saints of God” which points to the sainthood in all of us. I wonder if sainthood boils down to knowing that we are loved. Amen.