

Sermon: Human Love Divine
Scripture: Mark 12:28-34
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
Date: November 4, 2018

In the mental sparing matches that Jesus has with the Scribes and Pharisees throughout the Gospels there is this one shining moment when they agree. The scribe asks Jesus what is the first and greatest commandment of all and Jesus speaks the beginning of what the Jews call the Shema - "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one" and then he goes on to say the commandment - "you shall love God" and the second commandment comes right on its heels "you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The Gospels use the Greek word agape for LOVE so that doesn't mean we are to have affectionate warm cozy feelings towards everyone. Agape is not an erotic love, nor a familial love but a Divine-love, which has built into it this concept of charity or self-giving. From a Christian perspective God's very nature is love, so whatever we mean when we refer to that little three-letter word G-O-D we are talking about gift of the Self with a capital "S", Giving with a capital "G".

Jesus says we must love the Loving God – donate back so to speak what is given to us, which is our very life itself. The great sin or error, maybe the original sin, is to receive life and then cling to it rigidly for our own-selves, when life is given to us to be given away. This is why he qualifies the statement or expands the statement "love God" to be a full-self activity - "love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength." With your whole being love God – Body, mind,

and soul. In everything love God, donate your whole self to God's purposes and God's goodness, to God's love. And so that's not abstract in any way, Jesus goes on to say that one of the prime ways to do this is to love your neighbor as yourself.

CS Lewis has a beautiful way of explaining one way to do this:

The rule for this [loving your neighbor as yourself] is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering about whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less.

If you don't believe him, try it. Especially in the climate of today, this command could not be more important and more needed. With the hatred of the other writ large across our national stage and the invitation to fear and hate flowing out of the most powerful office in our country and world, we must hear Jesus' command anew and not underestimate how our little offerings of love can counteract larger invitations to hate.

Don't worry about whether you do actually love your neighbor, just do those things to them that you would do if you did love them, especially if you aren't feeling it, especially if you really don't want to. It's a curious thing about our being human – whatever is going on in here, which is often a mess of emotions, doesn't have to determine what we do out here. If you burrow deep enough, below that mess of emotions, resides the Image of God, which is a truer more authentic aspect of who you truly are and that Truer You wants to love regardless

of what the Surface You is grouching about. No matter what grievance the Surface You is nursing against others, the Truer You awaits just the smallest of spaces in that storm to emerge and do something loving.

And it's pure. It's not looking for an opportunity to love in order to manipulate the other into liking us or feeling better about us or to be the better one or take the higher road. It's love pure and simple. We love because we are made to love. We are made to have that reality flowing through our lives and especially where it gets blocked up and stuck, where we least want to give of ourselves, especially there is where the command to love is required. Jesus says later, basically, even the worst people love those who love them, you are called to something higher, to do unto others what you would have them do unto you, to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. That's another good one. As CS Lewis suggests, act like you love them even if you don't and one of the things we can do very practically is pray for them. Pray to God for those we do not like, especially for them, and that's how we can love them, that's how we can offer ourselves to our neighbor, friend or foe, and maintain the flow of love from God to us through the world. It's how it's supposed to work.

As most of you know, we are wrapping up our Stewardship Campaign and inviting you into a consciousness of this flow by asking you to give of yourself to your church and we remember this flow of love as we engage in this practice that we ultimately don't lose by giving but we become more fully ourselves; that our giving is a spiritual act, an act of the mind, spirit and body to give of the money we have to

strengthen and sustain the church. This orientation then not only benefits the church but also whatever other people and organizations out there look to you for your gifts. As in everything, our wealth becomes a detriment when clutched and a gift when flowing through us towards others. The flow is what makes us rich – “give generously and grow all the richer” is what the wisdom teaching of the Proverbs says. The amassing or stockpiling for our own benefit threatens to make us less than who we are meant to be. So please consider how your giving to the church and in this season your giving to others is a part of your spiritual practice to loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself.

And then as we approach the communion table we approach a central object lesson of Divine love because what is here are the symbols of Jesus’ total given-ness in love to us, all of us. It took all his mind, all his heart, all his strength to donate himself rather than preserve himself, to understand that the needs of others could best be met by the relinquishing of his own needs, to see that his suffering could awaken minds and hearts, that his being broken could effect healing for others and so he gave of himself fully, to enemy and friend alike, and that’s what’s represented in this supper.

May our partaking encourage a renewed commitment to imitate Christ in his total given-ness to the good of others, in His name, amen!

BENEDICTION

May the Lord who is our peace give us peace at all times and in every way. Go in peace