

## What is Love?

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you,  
Holy One.

When I was in my discernment process before I was approved to go to seminary, I did a series that included a bible study discussion of three questions. Where do you experience God in the world, who is Jesus to you, and how do you experience the Holy Spirit in your life? We used our text from today to frame our discussion. During our talk on experiencing God in the world, one of the participants asked, “How do I love God if I’m really mad at God?” It was a question that would be the foundation of most of our time moving forward. We spoke about mystery and prayer. and what it meant to love God through all of our human experiences and that God would still be there for us loving us without condition as we continued to try and actively love each other in similar ways. It was a deep and robust discussion that often ended with more questions than answers.

In our text for today, we again find Jesus being questioned by the Pharisees. The question to test him was, which commandment in the law is the greatest? Jesus responds in a way that resonates with those listening as he initially quotes Deuteronomy (6:5) and then brings in Leviticus (19:18) as additional support for his words.

This connects with those listening as sound teaching from Jesus. With Jesus' answer uncontested, he turns to those listening and poses a question of his own. It is in this question that Jesus silences those who have challenged him. In Jesus' inquiry, we also see more connections to the Jewish foundation of his identity. This in itself would be worthy of a full sermon.

As Christians, we sometimes miss those cues and forget that Jesus was not always teaching against those of his time but often demonstrating that the

teachings or laws of the time were not being fulfilled in ways that were just, especially for those on the outskirts of society.

As Jesus shares the answer to the question he says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

The love referred to in this text is translated as agape. Which we know is different than Eros. Eros is the emotional or passionate love and agape is a different kind of love. It is an active kind of love that is often associated with God, Christ and a loving-kindness that is merciful.

So what does it mean to Love God? We often talk about knowing that God loves us without condition, yet what might it mean for us to do the same for God? A helpful example comes in the second command from Jesus. One way to love God is to care and love for our Neighbors. To take care of that which God has created.

To show an agape kind of love for God is to be present to those who are suffering and find ways to engage the broken systems that cause suffering. To reflect on our own role in that process and work toward breaking those cycles of oppression and violence of which we might be apart.

Similar to the discernment group I was a part of before heading to seminary, we often have more questions than answers regarding these topics and issues.

This is difficult, deep spiritual work to which our text calls us today. To truly love God with all our heart, soul, and mind through our actions each day takes intention.

To love our neighbor requires us to know who they are, hear their needs, and deeply listen to how the spirit moves us to action.

Deep spiritual listening in this way takes time and practice. This congregation has done a great deal of work to connect with the local community and moving forward will need to continue this work as the needs of the community expand and grow. What role might we have to play in the ongoing conversations about displaced unhoused individuals?

What about disaster preparedness if there is another flood? Are there opportunities to partner with local organizations that we might collectively be a part of where the needs are manageable, given our unique gifts, limitations, and space?

We are called to actively love our neighbor in ways that go beyond welcoming them into our church. God meets us where we are, it is equally important that we meet our community in those places where they are.

This can't be the work of one person a committee or small group but must be the work of the whole.

Loving our neighbor can be simple. It can be sharing a kind smile with someone at the grocery store, or inviting a friend to join you when you volunteer at Laundry Love. Or simply asking folks how their heart is today.

In what ever ways you find to reach out and care for others as well as creation it is important to remember the bigger picture of God's love and the underlying call to Love God with all we are.

As we move forward with our lives this week my prayer for us all is that we find opportunities to show God's love, feel Christ's hope and know the deep peace of God's presence alongside us on our journey. **Amen**