

## **“A joyful, rage-ful, tearful and laugh-ful Love”**

**October 25, 2020**

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Text: Matthew 22:34-46

When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus refers directly to the Torah, quoting both Deuteronomy 6:5 (love the Lord your God with all of your heart) and Leviticus 19:18 (thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself).

Because of this, we know these words would not have surprised the Sadducees, chief priests, elders, scribes, Pharisees, and Jesus’s disciples who were listening to him or any of the folks who would have heard about this afterwards. In fact, I think this is something that across all of their differences, they would have agreed upon. And I think this is something all of us Christians today, no matter our denomination, could agree upon, too.

When I hear this, I am immediately drawn to the words, “And the second is LIKE IT.” And I am not alone. I noticed many biblical commentators have reflected on these words, too. Perhaps this also caught Your attention. – When Jesus says, “And the second is LIKE IT” ... it seems to me that in this second part, he is still continuing to describe the first greatest commandment. I think if he wanted to make a hierarchy here of importance (with love your God – then love your neighbor as yourself), he would have directly said, “and the second greatest commandment is...” but he doesn’t. He says, “and the second is like it,” placing the second part – love your neighbor as yourself—alongside/next to love your God.

At first this feels like a small detail, but if we are to read Jesus’s words this morning with equal importance or as all part of the same first greatest commandment, then this commandment is:

Love your God AND love your neighbor as yourself.

Meaning “loving your God with all of your heart” is not its own separate commandment from “loving your neighbor as yourself.” Meaning, we cannot do one without the other. This love Jesus is reminding us of and calling our attention to - is all interconnected. We cannot love our neighbor without loving ourselves and loving God. We cannot love God without loving ourselves and loving our neighbor.

To love God is to love our neighbor. To love God is to love ourselves. To love our neighbor is to love God. And to love ourselves is to love God.

And Jesus says to do this with ALL of our heart, with ALL of our soul, and with ALL of our mind. When we love with our heart, we are loving with our physical bodies – when we love with our souls – we are loving with our spiritual selves, and when we love with our minds– we are loving with our intellectual being. Jesus is calling us to a love that requires every part of us.

To see this all as part of one commandment is significant. Dr. Jason Edwards, a senior pastor of Second Baptist Church in Missouri, said in a blog, “It means that love of God, love of neighbor and love of self are all an intertwined part of the same whole. It means that the committed Christian must live a life that is upwardly, inwardly and outwardly directed. It means that we cannot claim that we love God and yet hate our siblings.” And I would add “we cannot claim that we love God and yet hate our earth or any of God’s creation.”

Upwardly, inwardly and outwardly – I love this image. Living a life that is upward – reaching to the stars, the moon, to the God who sees and loves us just as we are. Living a life that is inward -caring for our whole self, every part, even the parts we do not like, and living a life that is outward – reaching out

to our neighbors, holding each other in joy and in pain.

This is the love I believe Jesus is calling us to, a love that is expansive, that it is ever growing in all directions and a love that is whole. A love that we can always return to. A love that will be there to greet us over and over again with wide open arms.

In a few chapters from now, we will witness Jesus returning to God's love through prayer when he is consumed with pain and fear. After the last supper, Jesus takes Peter, James and John into the garden to pray. He turns to the three of them and says, "my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." Then he walks a little further into the garden. Three times he prays to God, "Abba, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

In this chapter, we witness Jesus returning to God – returning to God's love for strength and for comfort. We also see Jesus's humanity in this moment. We may not know exactly what this was like for him, but as humans we can imagine and understand the feelings of fear and sorrow he was experiencing.

Jesus trusted God so much to be fully vulnerable. He did not pretend like he was not afraid of what was going to happen to him, he did not pretend like he was not afraid of dying.

He shared his heart with God, and we can, too. And I think we need to share our hearts.

Yes, we can give thanks to God. We can ask God for comfort. But we can also tell God how it is. Being truthful. Being vulnerable. Sharing our tears, our anger, our frustrations. Sharing our joys, our celebrations. Knowing that God will hold us and will share all of this with us.

I believe that it is through being fully vulnerable with God that God can open and expand our hearts, so that we, too, can receive love and give love abundantly.

As God love us, we shall love God, and we shall also love ourselves with all of our heart, with all of our soul and with all of our mind.

One of the brothers, Brother Luke, from Saint John the Evangelist – the monastery here in Cambridge —once said, "stop and recover some of your humanity and be found by God." -----Recover some of your humanity ----- I think this is so important for us to do. Because I believe that it is through recovering our humanity (all the parts that make us smile, cry, laugh, shout), that we can love and be loved more deeply. That we can find and be found by God. We are not robots or machines, we have the ability to feel, to connect, to love – that is what makes us human.

To love ourselves is to hold on to what makes us human.

To love ourselves is to let ourselves just be. To love ourselves is to let ourselves cry. We cannot cry too much during these times. Friends, I will admit there are days that I will go for a walk and I can feel my eyes filling up.

Don't tell yourself to stop being silly, or to be stronger, and for the love of God – yes – for the love of God – do not apologize. Let yourself just be. Because love is also gentle and kind. Gently dab the water streaming down your cheeks. These tears remind us that we are human. That we are alive. That there is love in us and pouring out of us.

To love ourselves is to laugh. To laugh with one another, to laugh with God. I recall reading this book, *Gay Souls*, in my first year of Divinity school. I also shared this in the Dancing with God Faith and Life Group.

This book is a collection of interviews with gay men centered on their beliefs of the soul and what they believe their souls to be. In one particular interview with James Broughton, he talks about his friend, Alan Watts. Every morning, Alan would go out on his porch, hold his ribs, and laugh with God until his

whole body shook.

Love can tickle us. It can make our whole bodies shake. It can flow through us like the air we breathe, filling our lungs.

To love ourselves is to shout. Shout from a mountain top. Scream into a pillow. When I think about shouting and screaming, I am reminded when Jesus in Luke says,

“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” Love is releasing all that is on your mind – setting all of your burdens and worries on fire, setting all of those voices that tell you – you are not enough, you need to do better – on fire until they are mere smoke -dissipating into thin air.

And as we love God, ourselves, we shall too love our neighbors with all of our heart, with all of our soul and with all of our mind.

To love our neighbor sometimes feels simple, right? I am like okay, Jesus that feels totally doable... doable until someone cuts me off in traffic and beeps at me like it was my fault they had to cut me off. Feels doable until I am on hold with an insurance company for hours and then they hang up and I have to start the process ALL over again. And boy, it is really hard to love that next neighbor who picks up the phone to help me.

Out of all seriousness though, when it comes to love, it is not always smiles and rainbows. To love is to also experience rage.

Rage is different from hate. Lexi talked about this a few weeks ago in her sermon, quoting Rev. Heidi Heath. I found this incredibly powerful. Rev. Heidi says, “Rage is holy, but hate is destructive. Rage can be sacred it allows us to heal the world and be fueled for the revolution”

We witness Jesus releasing rage throughout our scriptures, even flipping tables in the temple. To love is to yell from the streets, “Black Lives Matter”

It is to say the names all those were killed...killed because of the complexion of their skin, because of their gender identity and expression...It is to cry out enough is too much. No one should go hungry. No one should go without healthcare. No one should be caged behind bars. It is to release all of this rage until we feel our hearts pounding, beating out of our chests... until our hearts break wide open...that is love.

To love our neighbor is to be still. To be present. To listen. To listen to what is said, to what is not said. Someone very wise once told me that things are easy to carry when they are shared. To love our neighbor is to share those things that weigh down our hearts. That make us feel like we are unable to move.

To love our neighbor is to love ourselves .....and to love our neighbor and ourselves - is to love our God.

I would like to close today with lyrics from The Bengson's (Bang son) The Keep On Going Song. This song has brought me much life this week.

“And I pray that ...when we meet again ...that the world has changed.... into the world that we are imagining now together and I pray that the world has become the world that we are planting in side of ourselves for each other and for our ancestors and for our kids...I pray that you will feel a little bit less alone. And we will feel a little bit less alone in the work and in the hurt and we will be together... somehow....”

Siblings, I pray that as we love God, as we love ourselves, as we love our neighbors with all of our hearts, our souls and our minds...as we can...that our world changes as a result in all the ways we so

desperately need right now. I pray that this love Jesus is calling us to and directing our attention towards will renew us, will sustain us, I pray that his love will help us all feel a little bit less alone... a little bit less alone in the days ahead....in the months ahead. I pray that this love will comfort us, will embolden us. I pray that this love floods through us in tears, rage, laughter and joy, reminding us we are alive and that we are also loved by God more than we can possibly ever imagine. Amen.