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“You Shall Love”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, October 25, 2020

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Matthew 22: 34-46

Matthew 22: 34-46

The Greatest Commandment

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

The Question about David’s Son

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴² “What do you think of the Messiah?^[a] Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit^[b] calls him Lord, saying, ⁴⁴ ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”?’ ⁴⁵ If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?”

⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more question.

Love is imagination.

Little Philip and his grandmother Nana were out for a walk.
She commented, “Doesn't it look like an artist painted this scenery?”

Can you imagine God painting this just for you?”

“Sure,” said Philip. “Bet God did it left-handed.”

“What makes you say God made this landscape left-handed?”

*"Well, last week in Sunday School," said Philip,
"my teacher said that Jesus sits on God's right hand."*

Imagine the closeness of the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, calling us to love.

Terri Hoard Owens is the General Minister and President of the Christian Church.

The Rev. Dr. Terri Hoard Owens said,
*"In these unprecedented times, more than ever,
we must have the courage
to imagine a new church for a new world.
We must give ourselves permission to change
and also to live in freedom from fear."*

Such courage to imagine a new church for a new world
Can only come from God.

As a matter of fact, such courage is borne of love,
a love that comes from God.

Not only does such love emanate from God,
God commands us to embody such love, as well.

When we do, whenever and however we do,
we discover the power of imagination,
the first step to change.

Love is imagination.

We begin from the beginning.
Consider the source of love.

*When the Pharisees heard that [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees,
they gathered together,
and one of them, a lawyer,
asked him a question to test him.*

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

[Jesus] said to him,

*"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."

Here Jesus refers to Deuteronomic code:

Shema Yisraeil, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

The Shema is a prayer to be recited daily,
A prayer to be taught to our children,
A prayer to be a signpost on our doors
A prayer to be embodied by our whole being.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.
God is one, and worthy of our praise!
In this one God, our Lord, we find our meaning and our hope.
In this prayer we remind ourselves
that God reminds us, commands us, demands of us
that we love.

You shall love.
Imagine, being told you shall love.
How audacious!
The audacious Spirit of God, commanding you to love.
Isn't love a feeling?
An emotion?
Something you feel for a family member, a friend, a lover, a favorite thing?
Is this what Jesus means, what God meant,
when the Commandment came down from above?
What was meant by commanding "*You shall love,*"
a command that so inspired the Levite Priests
that they set down the Deuteronomic Code of Laws,
and set at the top the primary objective of the Lord:
"*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*"

Love is imagination.

As you know, Jesus of Nazareth spoke Aramaic
and could read the Torah, which was written in Hebrew.

When Jesus spoke of the love of God, He said ***Ahava***.
We find love in every language, in every culture, in every community.

In Portuguese it's called "saudade"

*and means "the feeling of intense longing for a person or place."^[1]
The Chinese say "yuanfen."
And to the Swahili, "upendo" is affection and care.*

*The ancient Hebrew word "ahava"
that is often translated as "love" in the Bible
has a unique meaning too.*

*Love or "ahava" in the Hebraic mind
...is connected directly with action and obedience.
...the Hebrew word "ahava" is not an emotion but an action.
[Embodying] the idea of longing for or breathing for another.
Hebraically ahava is a verb and a noun,...[made known in] an act of doing.
[Love] is not something that happens "to you"
but a condition that you create when you give.*

*Ahava is not just a feeling...
[Ahava is a way of living.
Love is the Way of Life.]*

*Many Hebrew words can be broken down to a three-consonant root word
that contains the essence of the word's meaning.
The root word of ahava is "ahav."
The term ahav in Hebrew means, "to give."
True ahava, true love, is [primarily] concerned [with] giving.
[Giving takes precedence over] receiving.*

*Ahava is about giving devotion and time
[and your entire being, your whole self].
Giving is the vehicle of [divine] love.*

*YHWH so loved the world that God gave,
[God sent, God delivered] the only Son.
Meaningful relationships have mutual giving.*

Love is imagination.

*YHWH so loved the world that God wants all those in the world to love one another.
You shall love.
You shall direct your love towards God,
giving, serving, devoting your entire being,
all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, all your strength.*

And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Relationships grounded in mutual love are the ones we call meaningful.

God wishes to have a meaningful relationship with you,
so God gives, God blesses, God loves.
And this One True God has one primary commandment.
You, too, shall love.
You shall love.
You shall ahava, extend outward a giving love.

The Hebrew word that best describes God's giving, reconciling love is Ahava.

The Greek word best describing God's giving, resurrecting love is Agape.

We know that when the Gospels were first written down
the languages Jesus spoke were initially translated into Greek.
We know that in Greek there are three words for love,
each one describing love in different ways to emphasize and clarify
which sort of loving relationship we are discussing.
Philia – Brotherly or Sisterly Love, like a loving friendship
Philadelphia is the City of Brotherly Love

Eros – Erotic, Romantic Love, like between two souls that are attracted to one another

Agape – Unconditional Love, the kind of Love the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit has for
you
Unconditional meaning God loves you, and that's that.

God's love frees us and binds us at the same time.

Love connects us to the God of Creation,
and to all that God created and creates.
Love is not emotion.
Emotion, joy, passion may be attached, but love is more.
It has little, if anything, to do with infatuation.

Love is imagination.

Love is imagination to see people in light of the hope
of the wholeness that God has in store for them.
Love involves seeing someone as having a worth,
and loves sees worthiness in another soul
even when there is little outside evidence that this is so.
That, my friends, involves imagination.
Imagine the goodness in your neighbor.

Imagine that there is more to a person
than a first impression, or a mistake, or an imperfection,
or a connection with something or someone you find unpleasant.

Such imagination is a gift to you from God.

Imagination fires the mind and heart to look deeper,
to act with more responsibility,
and to make a greater sacrifice than our culture suggests.

As a matter of fact,
such imagination is a radical, counter-culture approach to love and life.

Who has looked at you with an imaginative love, and changed your life?
Who do you know who needs for you to look at him or her with an imaginative love?

A child was looking out her car window at the snowy street
as her father drove them through downtown.

Paused at a red light, she saw a shape under the snow.

"Daddy, what's that on the sidewalk?"

"It's a man. He's probably homeless.

Maybe he has to sleep there, on the street."

All the way home she could not get the image out of her head,
remembering his hands clasped together against the cold.

When they got home, she dug around in their glove drawer.

She found a pair that matched.

She pestered her dad until he agreed to take her back to the same corner.

They drove through the snow and pulled up next to the shape in the snow.

She jumped out of the car and ran to the man, kneeling by his side.

She gave him the gloves and placed next to him a brown paper bag with a sandwich.

He was quite surprised and said thank you

as he put on the gloves and peeked in the bag.

She stood up and looked around.

She saw that there were others, other men and women,

standing, sitting, lying on the snowy sidewalk,

curious about the girl and her dad.

She knew what she wanted to do, had to do, was called to do.

She went home and started contacting her friends,

asking them to share extra gloves, blankets, to make sandwiches.

The parents got involved.

A child's vision became a communal reality.

True story.

This was the genesis of a movement.
Today their city has a movement of love and generosity,
people sharing coats and resources, job training and opportunities,
all sparked by the imagination of a child,
a drop in the ocean
who refused to forget what God called her to remember.

*"The happiest people are fearless dreamers.
They use their imaginations to create hope and possibility."* --Ian K. Smith, M.D.

What would you do if you knew that God would not let you fail?
Who would you be if you trusted in the faith God has in you,
that you are a drop in the ocean,
a drop that can change the tide, alter the hue, raise all boats.

Imagine that.
Imagine you.
Imagine us, embodying love and compassion, together.

The late Will Campbell was a Baptist pastor,
but he wasn't like any you or I have ever known.
If you ever read the cartoon *Kudzu*,
Campbell was the model for the preacher Will B. Done.

The real Will Campbell delivered a sermon
in which he described his fantasy for an altar call.

He imagined a preacher inviting people to come meet Jesus,
and as the people begin to come down the aisle,
the preacher shouts to them,
"Why are you coming to me? Go out and find Jesus!"

And they turn and head out of the building.
In a little while,
news reports begin coming in.
Jails are being swamped
with people wanting to visit prisoners.
Nursing homes are overwhelmed
with folks coming to share God's love with patients.
Food pantries in town
don't have room to store all the food they've received.
And in every one of those places,
people are yelling, *"We want to see Jesus. We want to see Jesus."*

That's the invitation God offers.
That's the command Jesus insists we obey.

You shall love.

Yu shall love the Lord with all your heart, your mind, your soul.

Love is imagination.

Imagine that!

Seek Jesus in the face of our neighbor in need.

Self-giving care for others is at the heart of the revealed will of God.

Imagine that.

Imagine us, seeking and discovering Jesus in the faces of our neighbors in...

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

^[1] "Hebrew Word Study: Ahavah" Daniel Rendelman www.emetministries.com