

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, *and* ALL your soul, *and* ALL your mind. This, this is the greatest and first commandment. And the second, is much of the same, love your neighbor as yourself. That's it. Every other law. Every other teaching of the prophets. Every other thing we have received from God, is based on these two simple, straightforward proclamations founded on the principle of love. But, it's not that easy, is it? Love God with ALL your heart *and* ALL your soul *and* ALL your mind, that's asking quite a bit, even without asking us to also love our neighbor as ourself.

And, we here spend a lot of time on these concepts. We (hopefully) find the love of God here in church, and seek to absorb that love, and reflect it back to the creator, grateful for all that we have received. We especially spend a lot of time focusing on what it means to love our neighbor as ourself. This is important, particularly when our society, our cultural identity in many ways, encourages us to consider our neighbor as our enemy first, someone who will take away from us, someone whose success can only happen at our failure, someone who is in competition with us for the important, necessary things in this life: recognition, praise, promotion, success. We must learn what it truly means to love our neighbor as ourself, to see our neighbor as a piece of our beloved creation, to know that our neighbor cannot be against us if we fight for and with them, if we insure that all of our neighbors are afforded the same opportunities, the same basic rights of access, of health, of non-discrimination. We work very hard to see this reality. We work very hard to love our neighbor and ourselves, equally, with care, with appropriate concern, with an understanding that we all share in the making of this world, and that it is only through our

love that we will make sure that all of our neighbors can see that love present in every part of their lives.

But, what about God?

We're not called to love God as ourself.

We're called to love God, with ALL our heart, ALL our soul, ALL our mind.

This is quite the ask. This is quite the demand upon us.

It is the greatest and first commandment, and informs our understanding of the second which is like unto it.

In being called to love God, we must do so with reckless abandon. We must love the Lord our God with every expression of our being. We must love the Lord our God in every act we make, every word we share, every interaction we have with the all of creation. We cannot half-ass this. There is no room for loving God with some of our heart, some of our soul, some of our mind, for what is the remainder doing, if it is also not loving God? Are you harboring hatred toward a neighbor? Are you lusting after a neighbor's possessions, a neighbor's life, after a neighbor? Have you refused to seek forgiveness for the wrongs you have committed, for the sins that have harmed your neighbor? Perhaps it's more innocuous than that. Perhaps you simply ignore the phone when you see "Mom Calling" pop up on the caller id. If we fail to foster the love of God in all, if we choose to turn from God and look out for ourselves in selfish ways, in hateful ways, in neglectful, even shameful, ways, then we cannot live up to the call that is the first and greatest commandment. This is why the second commandment is tied to the first. For, loving our neighbor as ourself, is a living into

of the love we experience with and from God. When we live into loving the Lord our God with all, then we begin to understand how we can go about loving our neighbor as ourself.

Luckily for us, we have the opportunity to find that love of God, to experience that love that God has for us, even when we are not practicing it in return. This is what church is ultimately about. Sure, this is a place where forgiveness and healing are offered for those times when the love of neighbor as self fails to materialize, whether through our own failings or through the failings of others. But, this is only on offer because we first experience, and ultimately must always return to, the example of God's love for creation that is found in our scriptures, in our history, in our tradition. Church then must become for us the place where we seek to fill our hearts, our souls, and our minds, with the love of God, so that we may in turn love God with ALL of our being.

When God first created, there was one rule: to not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We couldn't do that. So, God kept giving us chances. Even after a great flood that wiped out mostly all of creation, we couldn't get it. Even after being led out of bondage and slavery, we couldn't comprehend the gift that had been given us, so we demanded rules to govern us, and then promptly proceeded to largely ignore those. So, it's telling (and perhaps unsurprising) that by the time we get to Jesus, we still hadn't gotten it. And, Jesus knows this. Jesus distills all of history and tradition down to two simple laws. We clearly hadn't gotten it up to that point, so perhaps if we were left with just two laws, Jesus may have been thinking that it'd finally click and we would live into the full potential of creation that seems to always be just beyond our grasp.

It's clear that we have yet to live into our full potential. And, I wonder if it's not so much an issue of not being aware, of not knowing what is being asked of us. We have church. We have education. We have experience. We know what the two greatest commandments are, I'm sure you could've named them for me if I'd asked before the service. So, if we have all that, why have we not lived into our full potential, why have we failed to love God, love neighbor, with all that we are and all that we have? I think the answer is twofold: I think we are greedy and I think we are scared.

I think that we are greedy. We come to church to absorb the love of God that is freely offered and given each and every week. We come to church to feel loved. To feel loved by God. To feel loved by our neighbors who ask how we're doing, who share in a feast with us at the table. We do this for our own self. And in many ways, that is a good and right thing to do. We come here to be made whole again, through forgiveness, through acceptance, through love. We come here to refuel for the good work we are doing in the world. We come here to be reminded of God's love. But, how often do we fuel up here, and then fail to reflect God's love to the world? Would it shock you if I said we all do this, myself included, nearly weekly? I think some of us have good weeks where we can love God with all and also love our neighbor as ourself for the entirety of a week, but for most of us, those weeks are few and far between. We absorb up all of God's love that is on offer here, and then keep that for ourselves, so that we can "survive" the week, failing to remember that it is in sharing God's love that we truly thrive, not just survive.

I think we are greedy, because we are scared. We are scared of others in this world. We are scared of our neighbor. We are scared because we surround ourself with

homogeneity, failing to see that it is only through diversity, diversity of people, of ideas, of experiences, of relationships with God, that we truly experience the beauty of creation that is seen in each and every one of our neighbors, an experience of beauty in creation that we cannot help but show love to, that we cannot help but respond with love in all of our being to God for the creation that we have been gifted. We are scared, but we have no need to be. For certain, there are people in this world that have harm on their hearts, and we must protect ourselves from being harmed by them, but if we are scared of them, then we will never be able to reach them and change their hearts to the love that is always available from God, and because of that, from us as well.

All of the laws and prophets hang on two simple phrases: love the Lord your God with ALL your heart *and* ALL your soul *and* ALL your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. If we could simply live into these two phrases, we would live into the potential that is within us as the creation of God. If we could simply live into these two phrases, we would change this world so that it reflected the inherent beauty that is found within it. It is up to us to decide to stop being greedy, to stop being scared. If we make this conscious decision, then we can begin to love the Lord our God with all, and if we can live into that, we can't help but also love our neighbor as ourself.

Amen.