

## Love One Another – Love Like Jesus

[Romans 13:8-12](#), [Matthew 18:15-20](#)

When the Israelites were called out of Egypt to be God's chosen people, God made a covenant with them. The covenant required many sacrifices and specific rituals as depicted in Exodus chapter 34. The accumulation of God's law was represented in the 10 commandments.

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. Do not make false idols.
3. Do not take the Lord's name in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.
5. Honor your mother and father.
6. Do not commit murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. Do not covet your neighbor's house or your neighbor's wife.

Many years later God sent his son to earth to be the fulfillment of a new covenant. Jesus presents quite a paradox. He states the law can be summed up in 2 principles – love God with all your

heart, soul, mind and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.

We have heard that saying so many times that I think perhaps the meaning may be lost. What does it mean to love our neighbor as ourselves? Can't we choose to love our neighbor if we happen to like him or her? Who is our neighbor?

Unconditional love – we've heard that one before as well. God challenges us to love without placing boundaries or hurdles in the way. But we like hurdles. We like boundaries. We like to choose whom we will love. Many times we have seen or experienced a time when we needed help. While driving on the highway our car acts up and we just wish someone would stop and give us a hand. And when someone does answer our prayer, we truly feel that helpful person understands the term 'love your neighbor.' When Jesus was asked, 'Who is our neighbor?', Jesus responded with the story of the good Samaritan. At

midnight, on a rainy dark highway, when a neighborly person stops to help us change a flat tire we even call that person a Good Samaritan. I remember a time when my family and I drove down to Florida to do the Disney thing. We were driving a Ford minivan that was not necessarily reliable so we prayed for a safe trip down and back. On our way back, as it was getting late, we started to have problems with our van. We were still 2 states away from home and were planning to drive straight through. We pulled into a Wal-Mart parking lot and the engine was smoking terribly. We're not mechanics and didn't have a clue what to do except to check the basics. While we were in the process of deciding what to do, we were approached by a Ford mechanic. He knew exactly what to do, and fixed our van in the parking lot with the tools all good mechanics always carry with them! He would not accept payment except our gratitude, even though we had changed his plans for the evening. This

man embodied the principle of loving your neighbor. We had just met and he saw we were in trouble. He graciously extended his hand to us using his expertise that we clearly did not possess. Jesus places no boundaries or hurdles to determine who our neighbors are. We are called to love all God's children as we love ourselves.

So how do we love ourselves? Society tells us to work harder and longer to advance our careers, make more money, and have more power, riches and prestige in order to love ourselves. Yet countless times we hear of folks that are married to their jobs, have issues with poor health, no concern for family matters, and they wind up absolutely miserable to the point where they become set on destroying themselves.

God calls us to share God's love with others. Some of us may have had the experience when we have helped someone through something simple – a visit to a nursing home patient, a

kind word to a struggling teenager, volunteering to stay late because a relief worker is struggling with a sick child. Those acts of kindness not only help those that the acts are directed to, but they also help us to love ourselves. We feel better. We are sharing God's love with our neighbors.

There is a story of two teenage boys who met in high school. One boy, John, was a bit of a geek. He was kind of awkward and was often picked on by other students. One Friday he was carrying an armful of books and was teased by a group of classmates. His books and papers ended up scattered all over the ground. Another boy, Randy, saw this happen and went over to help John with his stuff. Randy said, "Don't mind those guys they are just a bunch of jerks. Man, you must like to study, carrying all this stuff home on a Friday. I'm Randy." "I'm John," the other boy said. Randy invited John to come over and play some touch football at his house on Saturday – if John

could pull himself away from the books! John agreed and thus began a true friendship between the two. They remained friends all through high school. John really took to high school – he sort of grew into his frame and even though he was still a bit of a geek, it suited him. He even had a girlfriend for prom and was Valedictorian of his class. At graduation, John gave the speech that rocked Randy’s world. “I wanted to mention my friend Randy who literally saved my life. You see, the day Randy and I met, I was planning to kill myself. I had cleaned out my locker so my Mom wouldn’t have to do that after I died. I had it all planned, but when I met Randy, he became a real friend, introduced me to his buddies and showed me that life was really worth living. So Randy, I dedicate this speech to you. Thank you for saving my life.” No one was more shocked than Randy. He had no idea that his simple act of kindness would have such a huge impact on someone else.

Some seed planted years ago may take root long after we have lost contact with someone. We have heard of Sunday School teachers that have students coming back to them almost a generation later to say how much they enjoyed those Sunday school lessons and how those acts of sharing God's love came back to them years later. Sometimes we may feel the calling to share God's love is a thankless job. I remember a time when I was giving a lesson to a group of about 15 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders. These kids did not seem to be interested in anything I had to say. They were disruptive, over-energized and at times down-right rude. I had gone through every trick I knew to get them to focus to no avail. Finally, I got them in a circle, broke them in groups, and taught them a silly yet catchy tune. If nothing else, I finally got them to work together. When I was leaving the church, I heard the rowdiest group singing that song! I declared Victory!

Let us not forget that the new covenant involves a first and foremost charge – we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. That means we need to put God first in everything – our marriage, our family, our work life, or leisure time, everything. As we come forward for our time of communion, let us renew our love and dedication to God as we partake of the sacraments. Perhaps you have been involved in church for a long time and doing good works is a part of your daily life. However, if you have not made a commitment to love God first, perhaps today is the day that you will rededicate your life to God. It is the marriage of faith and works that is at the heart of the Methodist faith. Faith is defined in the first commandment – love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Works are defined in the second commandment – love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.