

PRAYER OF GATHERING

THE WORD OF GOD

JOHN 13:33-35 THE LOVE COMMANDMENT

33 Children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love (agape) for one another.”

ROMANS 13:8-10 LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

13.8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love (agape) your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

1 JOHN 4:8-11, 20-21

8 Whoever does not love (agape) does not know God, for God is love. 9 God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 20 Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Love. The subject of poets and poems; playwrights and plays; scholar and much research. We can write volumes about it and yet—we seem to understand very little about it. I could easily argue that the Bible writes about very little else. From beginning to end, I think scripture is an effort to tell us about the love of God for the creation God has made and the mission we have been created to fulfill. And what is our mission?

To tell the world that God loves the world God made.

Love is a gift of God for the people of God.

When we read about love in the Bible we find three different types of love and we have talked about this issue before. We have discussed how in the Greek language there are three distinct words for love: **Eros**-which is romantic love; **phili**os-which is brotherly love; and **agape**-or self sacrificing love.

Several years ago I spent with Linsey and Scott preparing for their wedding service and we talked about possible Bible texts for the service. Certainly we looked at some texts that spoke about Eros. We believe that romantic love is one of God’s greatest gifts to a woman and man, meant to draw them together, and over time bonding them together in a way that no one should break apart. But it is a love with a limited purpose as far as the world is concerned. It is not a love that is concerned with the hungry, the homeless, the abused of the world. In fact, it can be a very selfish love if not tempered with a sense of **Agape** as well. It is the **Agape** love that makes one person put the needs, and even the desires, of another ahead of their own. It is **Agape love** that our texts today speak about and that I want to reflect on as we talk about the gifts of God.

I have suggested that we have been created to be stewards of God’s creation. As a part of our role as stewards we have been granted a special status in the creation. We have been created in God’s image. We have been created in body and spirit: we have a physical self of this world, as well as spiritual self

that longs to be in harmony with our Creator. We have been given the gift of faith in our creator; a faith that roots us in God's own power to face the ravages of the storms of this world. Now we look at the gift of love, or maybe more accurately the **Commandment of love**.

The texts we have read are the voices of three New Testament figures, Jesus, John and Paul. And with a surprising unity they are offering the same message: **to love one another**, to love another even more than ourselves is the best way to demonstrate that we understand how much God and Christ have loved us.

Jesus and Paul seem to offering two visions of the same camel. Jesus says, "Here is a new commandment, 'Love one another.'" But Paul says, "Do you want to keep the Law of Moses? Do you want to obey the commandments that God inscribed on the tablets and that were kept in the Ark of the Covenant, then do this, 'Love one another.' Then you have kept all the commandments." Remembering that in the biblical vision of things, loving is an act and not a feeling, loving your neighbor is about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, housing the homeless, touching the leper, eating with the unclean. Loving means daring to be **unloved** by your own neighbor.

And then John goes one step further in his letter to the church when he says if anyone says they don't love their neighbor, then **you don't love God!** John says it is impossible to claim to love God and hate your neighbor since the heart that truly loves God can only be filled with love for our neighbor as well.

Hear these words from 1 Corinthians as Paul discusses the gifts that we have received thru the Spirit.

1 Cor. 13:1-3, 12-13

13 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but **do not have love**, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love (**Agape**).

It might be easier to read texts that speak about eros and philios instead of these text about agape. Certainly, Madison Ave finds it easier to sell eros. Even, philios, or brotherly love, is easier to sell as we encourage people to gather into clubs and fraternal organizations for normally safe socialization activities. But **Agape**, well, if it is going to involve loving people I really don't like....why would I want anything to do with that? Listen again to these words from 1 John:

9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

10 In this is love.... not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

11 Beloved, since God loved us so much,we also ought to love one another.

Love. It is a gift from God. Christ Jesus is Love for the World. Love is a gift to be cared for and shared. That it is what it means to be stewards. Amen.

Wherever you are as you read this, Take a moment with your family, or friends, to remember the blessings the Lord's Supper symbolizes for our lives and give thanks.

OUR RESPONSE TO THE WORD.

PRAYER OF GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise to the Lord.....

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

BREAKING OF THE BREAD, POURING OF THE CUP

When Jesus and his disciples began the Passover meal, Jesus took Bread, and after giving thanks, broke it, Saying, "This is my body broken for you. Take, share, eat and remember me.:

After the meal, Jesus took the Cup and said, "This is the cup of salvation, filled with my blood, shed for the forgiveness of YOUR sins. Take, drink, each of you."

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Every time we eat this bread and drink of this cup we proclaim the saving grace of our Lord's life and death until the time He gathers home with Him."

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

THE SENDING

Let us go out: witnessing to the Love of God revealed in Christ, seeking justice for all of God's creation, daring to be disciples of Jesus, who asks nothing less than our all, and who shapes and enables us to be, and do, more than we can imagine. Amen.