



Proper 25, The Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost
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October 25, 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our words from Jesus this Sunday are among the most famous in the all the gospels: the Great Commandment, love God and love your neighbor. Words that are easy to say, seem easy to obey, and yet often prove more challenging than we might have expected.

It is easy to love our neighbors when we agree with them, when they treat us the way we want to be treated, and when all is right with the world. But how do we follow this essential teaching of Jesus when all is not right with the world, when our neighbors are driving us mad with their words and habits of life? How do we love our neighbors in the midst of a pandemic and an election year?

To understand it better, I think we need to pay attention to how Jesus prioritizes what he asks us of us. First, he invites us to love God and then he invites us to love our neighbors. The truth that Jesus recognizes is that our neighbors are not always very lovable. Whether we're talking about neighbors in our family, among our friends, in our church, or in our community, personal relationships can be very challenging at times. And we must be honest with ourselves as well – just as we may have trouble loving those around us, so they may also have trouble loving us. The challenge of loving our neighbor is a two-way street.

Since it can be such a challenge to love our neighbors, Jesus suggests that we start by trying to learn to love God. This doesn't mean that it is easy to love God – Jesus doesn't tell us to start with God because God is easier to love than our neighbors. Rather, Jesus us points us first to God because is the origin, source, and cause of love.

Love is not something that we possess. Love is something inherent in God's nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Love is the aspect of God's nature that permits three distinct persons to live in harmony as one God. Loving relationship is more than just something that God does, loving relationship is something that God is.

Therefore, if we are going to learn what authentic, loving relationship looks like and learn how to practice it in our own lives, we are going to have to nurture our connection with the original loving relationship that is the source of all love: the Triune God who is love.

In the practice of silence, in prayer, in receiving holy communion, and in taking care of others, we nurture our connection with the loving relationship that is the heart of existence. And in doing so we are transformed, to look, think, and act more like our creator – the one who created us to live in loving relationship with him and with each other.

As we are immersed deeper into the life of God's love, we soak up that love like a sponge. And then, when life squeezes us – in times of stress, pandemic, or politics – what is squeezed out of us is the love we soaked up from our immersion in the Triune Life.

If you study Jesus' way of life as presented in the gospels, you see that this is how he did it. He lived his life in daily, prayerful dependence on his Father's love through the life of the Holy Spirit, and the love of God flowed through him into the world. By living our lives in that same prayerful dependence we will find that God answers us when we ask, as we do in today's collect, that he would increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and love; and make us love what he commands so that we may obtain what he promised: the ability to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Amen.