

Sermon 7 Pentecost Year C July 11, 2010

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. Do this and you shall live.” Amen.

This morning I want to talk about love...more specifically love of God. Our story says we have to love God with everything we've got. How do we love God?...Love one another, even those who don't like us....

This quote stated by the lawyer to Jesus is the central prayer and commandment that summarizes all the Jewish law. It is known as the Shema Yisrael, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one,” It is found in Deuteronomy 6:4, and in liturgical context is coupled with Deut. 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41. Observant Jews consider the Shema to be the most important part of the prayer service in Judaism, and its twice-daily recitation as a mitzvah. It is traditional for Jews to say the Shema as their last words, and mothers teach it to their children before they go to sleep at night.

GOD IS LOVE...and we are called to love God by love of neighbor. Simple enough...a basic teaching of our Christian faith that comes out of our mouth with ease. (T) ...Or **is it** that simple?

If God is love and if we are to love God with our whole mind, soul, heart and strength, then we might reflect on how God loves. How does God love?

We say that God is all omnipotent, infinite, and beyond our comprehension. If that is so, then God's love must be unbounded, infinite, and beyond the limits of our understanding.

Theologians talk about God's love as radical and without limit. God's radical loving. The word radical comes from the Latin RADIX or root. In this sense God's love is rooted in God's very nature. Some writers say that God's love is so radical—so complete—that even God cannot control God's loving. God's radical love is so full that it is never exhausted in its expression. God's love is borne out of this radical loving that is God's very nature. God is love...God is a radical lover. (T)

But there's another piece to God's radical loving. God yearns to be in relationship with creation... As I spoke about last week God says...Let us create humanity in our own image...and that's where we come in. Human nature has the innate capacity for the infinite. As the theologian Karl Rahner says, we are hard-wired for God.

So, if God is an infinite, boundless, creative, radical lover...and, if we have been hard-wired for the divine...then we too are called to love like God loves. We too are called to unbounded, limitless love. Our **destiny is to be radical lovers, whose love bears much fruit.**

To get a clue of what radical loving looks like for us, Jesus gives us the beautiful story of the good Samaritan. The good Samaritan is a story about radical loving...love that comes from unexpected places, at unexpected times, in unexpected ways.

In our contemporary context we see the Samaritan as a goodly fellow coming down the road. But the hearers of Jesus' time would have heard something very different. It would not be lost on them that this radical love came from someone who was not an equal, someone outside of the group; someone who is unclean, unworthy, lesser—a Samaritan is held up as an example of radical hospitality and compassion. In the story Jesus contrasts the response of those inside the group, the priest and the Levite with someone from the outside. Here again, Jesus is using an example of someone who lives on the margins to make his point. (T)

God's radical love leads to some pretty strange ideas...love of enemies, love of those who persecute us...love of the stranger...love of those different from ourselves. And, yet...this is God's way...It is always God's way. Jesus came into the world as God's witness to God's radical love...and it led to his death.

Radical love can be unsettling. It makes us look at things we would rather not see. It sheds light on our limitations. And so, we too often say...it's impossible to love like that?

- We struggle to love our enemies.
- We hold back from asking for God's grace to love like God loves. Jesus got himself killed because of radical loving...why WOULDN'T we hesitate to love like that?
- Yet, in spite of fears and limitations God's radical love breaks into your life and mine. (T)

Where there IS charity and love, there IS God. My invitation today for all of us is to:

- Look for God's radical love in places we do not expect it.
- Call on God's radical love to transform us.
- Ask God to help US bring love where love is needed.
- Open ourselves to divine radical love that we might love with our whole heart, our whole mind, our whole soul, our whole strength...
- May we become lovers in service of the One *whose radical love led him to the cross and us to eternal life.*

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