

The Second Greatest Commandment

“Love your neighbor as yourself” What is love? Martin Luther King said “Agape love is something of the understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill for all people. It seeks nothing in return. When you reach this level of love, you love others not because they are likeable but because God loves them. You can look at everyone and love them because you know God loves them.

There are so many passages in scripture about loving others! I am going to concentrate today on what Jesus says is second only to loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, in fact I think Jesus meant that the best way to show love to God is to show love to his creation. We are to love others because God loves them not because we think they are worthy of love.

Jesus repeatedly told us to love one another-to love our neighbor- to even love our enemy.--maybe I should say especially to love our enemy. As we read in Matthew (5:43-44) “You have heard it said, ‘love your friends, hate your enemies’ But I tell you; love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Jesus goes on to say “Why should God reward you if you love only those who love you? Even the tax collectors do that! And if you speak only to your friends, have you done anything out of the ordinary? Even the pagans do that!”

John (13: 34-35 and John 15: 12- 13) relates Jesus telling his disciples of his coming death, This is when he gives what he calls a new commandment to “love one another”

In our call to worship we read Jesus command to love you neighbor as yourself’ He says there is no commandment greater than Loving God and your neighbor. Matthew also tells this story of Jesus and the pharisees when he says the greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all you soul, and with all your mind. This is the most important and Greatest commandment. The second most important commandment is like it ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ The whole law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments’

Why do I mention so many passages about loving others? Because I think that Jesus considered this the most important way we can serve God. John 13:35 says “If you have love for one another then everyone will know that you are my disciples” Dare I say that in today’s parlance he would say that “They’ll know we are Christians by our love?”

I’m going to talk this morning about loving one another, loving your neighbor, and loving your enemies. These three are really one commandment to love others because God loves them and they are created in His image.

First is love one another.

Who does this include? I suggest that 'one another' includes those we interact with on a daily basis. Our family, our co-workers, our next door neighbors, our church family, check-out people at the local Wal-Mart, or Kroger's, people we meet as we go about our daily lives.

How do we show love to those we come into contact with? Here are a few suggestions.

Be polite and courteous to others-let someone in line before you, opening doors for others, yielding to other drivers on busy streets, forgiving those who cut you off (there are many ways to show love as you drive-as a bonus driving politely will help keep you and your passengers safe!)

Pay kindness forward without expecting thanks or reward

A smile can go a long way to those you meet on the street (or the harried checker at the store, even tho he may seem to ignore you as he is checking your items)

A kind word to those who need encouragement can give a person just the boost she needs

How about a cheerful good morning to that grouchy neighbor?

Praying for others is an important way to love others

Being "neighborly". Help the busy mother, drive someone who has no car to an appointment, loan your neighbor a tool (even tho you may not get it back)

Listen to others carefully instead of superficially.

I'm sure you can think of other ways that you show love each day---Small things but they can make a world of difference in someone's day.

I think it is especially important to show love to those you are most intimate with-your family. Don't take your spouse, partner, parents, children, siblings, grandparents (you get the point) for granted. We sometimes get so caught up in our daily lives that we neglect those most important to us-our family. Do something special, no matter how small, each day, for those who mean so much to you. Perhaps a quick, or maybe a long, phone call or text to say " I love you" to those who are living in another area.

Next is love your neighbor'

A. Who is your neighbor?

a. Webster's Dictionary defines neighbor as a fellow human being. I think that is a good concise definition.

In this context of "love your neighbor" we should consider

Those in need of food, shelter or other necessities.

Other neighbors are the **lonely**

A few minutes of you time is a very small sacrifice that can bring immense joy to a lonely person.

.On a larger scale our neighbors are **those seeking asylum** from danger or death in their country and those seeking a better life for themselves and their families.

There are many others who fit in this category- the sick, the depressed, the homeless, the angry, the poor, the wealthy, those in prison the list can go on and on but Jesus commands us to love them

How do we love our neighbor?

You showed your love recently in your generous gifts of money, clothes, and personal items to Jeremiah and Renee's family after they lost their home and possessions in the fire

The need is so great, we can't help everyone but we can do our part.

Jesus says love your neighbor as yourself. James says "Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don't have enough to eat, What good is there in your saying to them, "God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!"--if you don't give them the necessities of life? James was talking about faith without works is dead but dare I say that the same holds true "Love without works is dead"?

Although we can't directly help everyone in need we can donate part of our many blessings to charities that help those in need CCA, Red Cross etc.

Other ways to show our neighbors love are the same as I suggested for loving one another- courtesy, a smile, a cheerful hello, a kind word, praying for others and their needs.

I think the most important thing to keep in mind when thinking about loving your neighbor is how you want to be loved.

Remember the golden rule "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" Matthew 7: 12

Now we come to the the Hardest one of these three commandments, (which by the way are really only one), Compared to loving your enemy, loving those close to you and even those around the world who are in need is a piece of cake! It may seem impossible to love those who wish us harm but God has commanded just that.

First I want to talk about who is **not** your enemy. One The enemy is not those of a different race, color, sexual orientation, nationality, or even those of a different political view. Two The enemy is not those of a differing christian demonation- be they more conservative or more liberal than you. The enemy is not even atheists. The enemy is not those of differing faiths. Today muslims are a favorite enemy of many Americans even Christian Americans. Three The enemy is not those who look different or have differing customs that seem strange to us, These are people who don't fit in our idea of what is acceptable behavior.

These people are not our enemy. They would fit in the neighbor category. God commands us to love them as we love ourselves.

Okay, back to love your enemies.

I would dare to say most of us do not have many or any who would be a real personal enemy. Maybe the current term that the tabloids use "frenemy" would fit those people better. **An enemy would be someone who wishes you very real harm or even works to bring about your death or destruction.**

America has enemies. Isis or formerly El Quaida or any other radical terrorist group or people, both foreign and domestic that wants to bring destruction to America or any other country is obviously our enemy!

Jesus said we must love these people. Jesus said over and over that we must love everyone even our enemies!

Does this mean that we don't defend ourselves? No but we must defeat evil systems, Individuals who happen to be caught up in that system, you love, but you seek to defeat the system.

How do we defeat the evil systems? Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. whose birthday we recently honored knew first hand about enemies and evil systems. King had real enemies, in fact enemies took his life but he never yielded to the temptation of hating his enemies. He hated the system and worked and gave his life in fighting the system. He delivered a sermon about loving your enemies on november 17 1957 which I will refer to for the next few minutes.

Dr. King said that Jesus is a practical realist. In Matthew we read these words from our Lord and master "you have heard that it has been said, "You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy' but I say to you , Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you; that you may be the children of your father which is in heaven.'

King goes on to say "The words of this text glitter in our eyes with a new urgency. Far from being the pious injunction of a utopian dreamer, this command is an absolute necessity for survival of our civilization. Yes, it is love that will save our world and civilization, love even our enemies."

I say with King that Jesus was very serious when he gave this command. This is a basic philosophy of all that we hear coming from the lips of Jesus, our teacher, our Lord, and our Master. Jesus wasn't playing, he was serious when he said 'love your enemies.' We have a Christian and moral responsibility to seek to discover the meaning of these words, and to discover **how** we can live out this command, and **why** we should live by this command.

We will now consider "how do you go about loving your enemy? The **first** thing is this: in order to love you enemy you must begin by looking at yourself.

Maybe there is something in you that causes people to hate you. this is also true of our country. Democracy is the greatest form of government that man has ever conceived, but the weakness is that we have never conceived it. Isn't it true that we have have often taken from the masses to give luxuries to the wealthy. As Bernie Sanders repeatedly says the top 1% have 98% of the wealth in our country. There are also other examples of where America has failed in the dream of our founders.

One of the greatest failures of democracy was slavery. These are a couple of examples of why Jesus says "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye; but pay no attention to the log in your own eye."

The second thing one must do in seeking to love his enemy is to discover the element of good in his enemy. Every time you begin to hate another person, stop and think that there is some good there. Remember that there is "a little bit of good in the worst of us and there is a little bit of bad in the best of us. There is something within us that can identify with the Apostle Paul when he says "I see and approve the better things of life, but the evil things I do."

Somehow the "isness" is not in harmony with the "oughtness" of what we should do. Within each of us there is some evil, and within the worst of us there is some good. The person, the nation, the race, the group that hates you the most has some good in it. Why do I say this? It is because we are all created in God's image, if you look at your enemy and see deep down within him the image of God, you will love him in spite of what he does. No matter what he does, you see God's image in him.

Another way to love your enemy is when the opportunity presents itself to defeat your enemy. This is when you must not do it, Love is creative, understanding goodwill for all people.

Again I say, although it seems the opposite of common sense, When you rise to the level of love, of its great beauty and power, you seek only to defeat evil systems, Individuals who happen to be caught up in that system, you love, but you seek to defeat the system.

In the last few minutes I will talk about **why** we should love our enemies.

In South Dakota there are many two way roads. If you are driving at night you must dim your lights when you meet another car. If someone doesn't dim their lights and you decide to do the same thing there will be too much bright and blinding light and you will end up in mutual destruction. Someone has to have enough sense to dim the lights! If we as a nation look at our enemies and refuse to dim our lights because they refuse to dim theirs, we will all end in destruction. We will all be destroyed because nobody had any sense on the highway of history. Somebody must have enough sense to cut off the chain of hate and the chain of evil in the universe. You do that by love

Another reason to love your enemies is that **hate distorts the hater**. Hate is more injurious to the hater than to the hated.

I think one other reason Jesus said to love your enemy is its redemptive power. An example of this is in one of our presidents. Abraham Lincoln chose a man who had tried to destroy him with many disparaging statements about him while he was running for president, Lincoln chose Stanton to be Secretary of War in spite of knowing the evil and unkind things that Stanton had said about him during the campaign, Because Lincoln said he was the best man for the job. A few months later when Lincoln was assassinated Stanton said "now he belongs to the nations."

In closing I want to say that although we may fall short of the command to love everyone, it is a goal to strive for each day. Each new day we can ask God for forgiveness for our failure to love and ask him for help in loving others.