

“Spirit of Compassion”

What if we lived life truly connected to the origins of Creation and the Creator? In the beginning God created all things and called them “good.” In this **Sacred Earth – Sacred Work** series we are exploring six essential ideas found in Creation Spirituality – a way of living within the community of earth that deepens our reverence for life, participates in the creativity of the cosmos, and develops our passion for justice and human transformation. It compels us to lead lives of spiritual inquiry, creativity, and prophetic action as our sacred work in the world.

It is through the work of spiritual practice that we move beyond fear into compassion and discover our deep and true selves. Engaging in spiritual practices – whether that looks typically religious (like praying) or not (like walking) have intentionality in common. **They draw us closer to the Creator and who we were created to be – free and compassionate beings.** Let’s consider the practices in our lives which draw us closer to our true essence and closer to compassion for others. Or, put another way, **“What is the Sacred Work we are called to do on this Sacred Earth?”**

G. K. Chesterton helps us have a better understanding of our context – the human situation or condition.

“Chesterton once said that the really great lesson of the story of ‘Beauty and the Beast’ is that a thing must be loved before it is loveable.” “A person must be loved before that person can be loveable.” Chesterton continued, “Some of the most unlovely people I have known got that way because they thought that nobody loved them. The fact of the matter is that unless and until we feel ourselves loved, we cannot love. That’s not only a principle of theology but of psychology and sociology as well. Just as abused children grow up to abuse their children, loved children grow up to love their children. Loved persons are able to love. Unloved persons are not. Christianity says something startling.” **“It says that God loves and accepts us ‘just as we are.’ Therefore, we can love and accept ourselves and in so doing, love and accept others.”** (As reported by Donald B. Strobe, Collected Words, www.Sermons.com)

By sending Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to this Sacred Earth, our Divine Parent revealed God Agape Loves us “just as we are” and, also, gave us both the example of agape loving God and all people, as well as, the call to do the same. Talking about the uniqueness of agape love in our world, Garret Keizer said, **“Loving with our souls goes beyond what people would consider as normal. We give forth our love because we want to and it probably makes no sense to outsiders.”**

Keizer went on to provide an example of this remarkable agape love by sharing, “During the course of earning her master’s degree, a woman found it necessary to commute several times a week from Victory, Vermont to the **state university in Burlington**, a good hundred miles away. Coming home late at night, she would see an old man sitting by the side of her road. He was always there, in subzero temperatures, in stormy weather, no matter how late she returned. He made no acknowledgment of her passing. The snow settled on his cap and shoulders as if he were merely another gnarled old tree. She often wondered what brought him to that same spot every evening. Perhaps it was a stubborn habit, private grief or a mental disorder.

Finally, she asked a neighbor of hers, ‘Have you ever seen an old man who sits by the road late at night?’ ‘Oh, yes,’ said her neighbor, ‘many times.’ ‘Is he a little touched upstairs? Does he ever go home?’ The neighbor laughed and said, ‘He’s no more touched than you or me. And he goes home right after you do.’” **“You see, he doesn’t like the idea of you driving by yourself out late all alone on these back roads, so every night he walks out to wait for you. When he sees your taillights disappear around the bend, and he knows you’re okay, he goes home to bed.”** (“Watchers in the Night” by Garret Keizer adapted by Keith Wagner in “Almost Heaven”)

That elderly neighbor was demonstrating sacrificial agape love. To aid our deeper understanding of agape – sacrificial and self-giving love, let’s take a closer look at **verse 33 of our Gospel Reading, when the questioner affirmed the two greatest commandments Jesus gave in his answer. Among other things, the scribe responded to Jesus’ two commandments, saying, “And you must agape love God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength; and you must agape love your neighbor as you agape love yourself. It is more important to obey these two commandments than to offer on the altar animals and other sacrifices to God.”**

In discussing that response by the legalist David Ewart, using a different translation wrote, “Notice that the Scribe doesn’t just say, ‘more important;’ he says, ‘MUCH more important.’” Ewart continued, **“And remember that the Scribe has just said that the source of his livelihood is much less important than attending to the well-being of our neighbours.”** In brackets, Ewart suggests, “(Let’s have a show of hands of all those present who feel the same way as this Scribe.)”

Returning to the text, we are told in **verse 34**, **“Jesus noticed how wise his answer was, and so he told him, ‘You are not far from the Kingdom of God.’”** It was truly remarkable that the Scribe had been so positive in response to Jesus’ answer but it was especially out of the ordinary for Jesus to suggest a legalist was close to the Kingdom of God. David Ewart also recognized the extraordinary nature of their exchange and said, “Notice that like the rich, young man (Mark 10:17) Jesus SEES the Scribe as having answered wisely. But unlike the rich, young man Jesus does not ask him to give up his occupation, nor does he ask him to follow him. Instead Jesus publically honours the Scribe with a word of praise: You are not far from the Kingdom of God ... Which of course is an indication of the fulfillment of Jesus’ original mission to proclaim: The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near.”

Ewart concluded, “Who knew that at the peak of confrontation between Jesus and the religious elites of Jerusalem, it would be one of them who would embody Jesus’ proclamation of God’s Good News?” (David Ewart posted on www.holytextures.com)

Returning to our focus on our Sacred Work being agape loving God and our neighbors – all our neighbors – everyone, Alan Brehm helped us dig deeper. He wrote, “The ‘first’ commandment, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,’ came from the Shema, which was and still is the heart of the Jewish faith.” **“And the ‘second’ commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ is part of a summary of the Torah in Leviticus called the ‘holiness code.’”** “It’s called that because its theme is ‘you shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy’ (Lev. 19:2).”

Brehm elaborated, “We usually think of ‘holiness’ in a Jewish context as determined by avoiding certain foods, but there’s much more to Leviticus. Chapter 19, where Jesus gets the ‘second’ commandment, is a restatement of the Ten Commandments in some fairly specific ways. For example, in place of ‘you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain,’ Leviticus 19 says, ‘you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God’ (Lev. 19:12).” **“It not only says ‘you shall not steal,’ it also says not to withhold a laborers wages and to use honest weights and balances in trading with others. It not only says ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ it also says, ‘you shall love the stranger as yourself’ (Lev. 19:34, RSV)!!!”**

Brehm sharpened his focus, “The point is that Jesus was not breaking any new ground with his identification of the two great commandments. He was expressing the ideal of faith found in the Hebrew Scriptures. It’s the conviction that we were all created to live in relationship with God, a covenant of trust, devotion, and obedience.” **“God’s original intention for humanity in the first place was to live in relationship with God, loving and serving God by loving and serving others — a life of obedience that creates justice, and freedom, and peace for us all. It is the life that is truly life.”**

Brehm concluded, **“You see, the freedom we have to live a new life in Christ was a gift to all humankind, not just to us. We who have encountered the freedom of this new life, this true life, have this freedom for the purpose of sharing it.”** (Posted by Alan Brehm on thewakingdreamer.blogspot.com)

Our Sacred Task on this Sacred Earth is to be the people our Creator intended us to be. The two commandments Jesus gave in his response to the questioning of the Scribe provided us important content for the Life of God’s Kingdom. We are to agape love God with our all and we are to agape love our neighbors – even strangers! **Indeed, Jesus provided us the example of living the New Life in Christ as he welcomed and healed everyone and shared with them the Truth about God’s Forgiveness, Agape Love, Grace, Invitation, and Welcome into God’s Kingdom – the New Faith Relationship with our Divine Parent and the New Life of Agape Love in Jesus Christ.** The Spirit of Compassion we are called to manifest is the life, which we embody, as we carry out our God Is Still Speaking Emphasis and its message that “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.” **Let’s respond to the Agape Love God Demonstrated for us and for everyone in the Creation and in Jesus Christ by accepting the invitation and the call to live the New Life in Christ – the Life of Agape Loving God and All People – seeking human transformation, healing, and justice for everyone! Amen.**