

“Love ‘Em Anyway!”  
A, Pentecost 21; 10:00 am  
Matthew 22:34-46; October 29, 2017  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

## **I. THE GREATEST? OR?**

### The Greatest Commandment

<sup>34</sup>When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, <sup>35</sup>and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” <sup>37</sup>He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup>This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

## **II. EITHER/OR or BOTH/AND**

Ah...the Pharisees are at it again. Think “paparazzi” in our day. Jesus just can’t get a break. First, the Pharisees come to him asking about ultimate allegiance: is it to go to God or Caesar? Are we supposed to pay taxes, whether or not the government is corrupt and oppressive?

Then, the Sadducees hit him up: “If a man dies and the widow marries his brother, whose wife will she be in the Resurrection?”

And then, the Pharisees are back with this Greatest Commandment conundrum! It’s like a never-ending pile up of twenty questions, almost resembling “Who’s On First?!”

It’s not really a conundrum for Jesus, and we’ve gotten so used to hearing these two commandments recited as the “greatest” that we might miss the trap the Pharisees are trying to set. For the Law was 612 laws all told, and in that world it was actually a *heresy* to say or even imply that the others were *less* important. Kind of a false dichotomy like:

Did you put on shoes this morning, or did you come to church in a car?

Or, “What’s more important, the sun or the moon?”

The Pharisees are not just trying to trap Jesus into having to spout the “wrong” answer, they are trying to force an “either/or” from Jesus: “What is the GREATEST commandment? Which one is more important than the others; wins the contest?”

And Jesus, always quick with the twist and not one to be trapped, replies with a Both/And; all of the above! Love God completely AND Love your neighbor AND, while you’re at it—love yourself too!

Instead of reducing the importance of the rest of the laws, he paints a picture of them as a coherent whole that “hangs together”—and they hang together on love.

### **III. ON THE JOURNEY TO AND**

“Hanging together” is what we’ve been doing—on this journey as community, these past weeks. And last week, we explored the path on our journey that leads to the “And.” Looking for the both/and instead of the either/or in *any* situation we find ourselves in, and in our relationships with one another.

We looked at many places in our community and personal lives where we *could* get stuck in the Either/Or, but were, in fact, managing to get to the Both/and. Did you find any “AND’s” this week?

Pastoral note: some of you heard that as “we gotta do more” and got tired just listening! But let me reassure you that all those things I mentioned—we are *already doing*, and my noting them was for the purpose of celebrating what *is*, in fact, happening when we look for the “and.” Sometimes we don’t even realize it!

So, let’s keep on doing what we’re doing—just recognize and celebrate it! More work is not needed—it’s actually *easier* when we team up and collaborate on what we’re already doing.

### **IV. LOVE GOD**

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

#### **Feel it Tugging**

A man once observed a young boy out in a field flying a kite. He noticed that there was something odd about the way the boy was standing and holding on to the string. He

walked up to the boy and then learned that the boy was blind. He said, “Do you like flying kites?”

The boy said, “I sure do.”

This piqued the man's curiosity and he asked, “How is that when you cannot **see** it?”

The boy answered, “I may not be able to see it but I can feel it tugging!”

We may not always be able to identify the love of God in this world. Like the little boy, we may not be able to see love but it has a tug that lets us know it is there.

(Brett Blair)

“I may not be able to see it but I can feel it tugging.” We are living in “tugging times.” Times that call out to us not to stay where we are, safely in our comfort zones, happily oblivious to the hurting world around us.

We are tugged on from every direction. Sometimes that can be overwhelming. There is so much going on in our world today, and so many ways we can communicate now that we couldn’t before. There’s a term for that that has been coined in the last few years: Compassion fatigue.

Compassion fatigue has its parallel popular notion: “Human Being vs. Human Doing.”

But basically, it all comes down to the fact that we are barraged on a daily, even hourly basis, to “do more.”

That who we are and what we are busily doing is never enough. That was just need to do more, love more, care more, take on more roles, projects and programs.

What if loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength means both/and: accepting that we are human beings *and* human doings, and taking the “versus” out of the middle of that?

What if allowing ourselves to be **tugged** by God, even when we can't always see the other end of the string, means that we are held fast and firm, and can rest in knowing that we are exactly where we are meant to be—aligned with God—feet firmly planted, holding on, being tugged, and just being held?

## VI. LOVE NEIGHBOR

<sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

In getting our heads around this, it's important to keep in mind that Jesus is not talking here about “love” as a romantic notion—the stuff of Hallmark cards and Valentine's Day and little red hearts on Facebook or x's and o's on the bathroom mirror.

Jesus is talking about *agape*; a biblical kind of love—not all about warm feelings and mushiness, but an all-encompassing, stubborn, unwavering commitment kind of action or decision. Love and commitment are a choice. A way we freely choose to live our lives. Douglas Hare, a theologian, describes it this way:

“Commitment is that mysterious mingling of feeling and action, a beautiful dance between the two.”

But, also, we have to get our minds around those times when we don't feel like dancing! What about those times when your neighbor of many kinds—whether in your hood or far away—is not only the last person you'd be sending little red hearts too, but just plain difficult? Someone you really *don't* want to be committed to love in *any way*?

We sang it earlier. Sometimes we broil at God's asking us this seemingly simple task. Sometimes we swear it's easier to try to love our enemies than our neighbors. At least *they* might be far away and we don't have to deal with them on a daily basis!

### "Anyway"

You can spend your whole life buildin'  
Somethin' from nothin'  
One storm can come and blow it all away  
**Build** it anyway

You can chase a dream  
That seems so out of reach  
And you know it might not ever come your way  
**Dream** it anyway

[chorus:]  
God is great, but sometimes life ain't good  
When I pray it doesn't always turn out like I think it should  
But I **do** it anyway  
I **do** it anyway

This world's gone crazy and it's hard to believe  
That tomorrow will be better than today  
**Believe** it anyway

You can love someone with all your heart  
For all the right reasons  
And in a moment they can choose to walk away  
**love** 'em anyway

*[chorus]*

You can pour your soul out singing  
A song you believe in  
That tomorrow they'll forget you ever sang  
**Sing** it anyway  
Yeah, sing it anyway  
I sing, I dream, I love  
Anyway

This song, co-written and sung by Martina McBride, was inspired by the challenges of life and love, as well as a poem by Mother Teresa.

*(Found written on the wall in Mother Teresa's home for children in Calcutta:*

**People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.**

**If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.**

**If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.**

**If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.**

**What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.**

**If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.**

**The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.**

**Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.**

**In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.**

## **VII. LOVE SELF**

**In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.**

Which brings us to the final “and” of the greatest commandment:

‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

For it all hinges together. For to truly love our neighbor—anyway—is to let them be themselves and allow ourselves the same.

*Thomas Merton, No Man Is an Island, 20th century*

"The beginning of love is the will to let those we love be **perfectly themselves**, the resolution not to twist them to fit our own image. If in loving them we do not love what they are, but only their potential likeness to ourselves, then we do not love them: we only love the reflection of ourselves we find in them."

Ah....love of self. How easy to talk about and how hard to do. Because our culture makes it an either/or. *Selfishness* runs rampant, and rears its ugly head as a contrast in competition with love of others, or concern for the common or higher good.

But *true* love of self, *as* you love God with your whole self and your neighbor with full, intentional commitment, is holy and necessary. For we cannot truly love God and neighbor with our whole heart, soul and mind, if that heart, soul and mind doesn't believe that its fully loved by God—as is, “just as I am”—lock, stock and barrel!

It's all inextricably woven. Both and, and, and. Trying to love God or your neighbor when you don't love yourself, and can't see yourself and others through God's loving eyes, and really believe you are loved as much as anyone else, is nigh on impossible.

Sometimes you just have to make up your mind to *try*. To tint those lenses toward the rose-colored-hue, knowing that we're all in this together behind those eyes; all unquestionably linked as one.

“Resolve to be tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant with the weak and wrong. Sometime in your life, you will have been all of these.” (Anonymous)

Resolve to be tender with your own young self, compassionate with yourself as you age, sympathetic as you strive, and tolerant with your self when you are

weak and wrong. For sometime in your life, you are all of these, and that's okay!

When we can begin to love ourselves as God loves us, and has since we were knit in our mother's wombs, we begin to come home to ourselves, and come home to one another and find true community.

Ponder this:

“We are all longing to go home to some place we have never been - a place half-remembered and half-envisioned we can only catch glimpses of from time to time. Community.

Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power.

Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Someplace where we can be free. (Starhawk)

When you come home to yourself, you find you can come home to community. When you find yourself in true community, you just might find you can finally be yourself. And *that* is what loving God with your heart, soul, mind and strength looks like!

## VII. LOVE INTO THE WEEK

So, this week.....

As we journey together—here in this place on the “March to Bazaar”, as well as in all our places of life, work, service and relationship—with our neighbors as with ourselves, we have two signposts—two pivotal teachings from Jesus to guide us:

Look for the AND.

Keep on keeping your eyes and ears open for the Either/Ors that could be transformed into Both/Ands. Celebrate the AND! Rejoice in the coming together of things that once were apart: ideas, projects, missions, events, strangers, communities.

And....also.....

Look for the “ANYWAY.”

For the opportunities that abound to give a different answer than expected. To respond in love to our neighbors and ourselves, when the situation seems to call for a more standard reaction.

Love ‘em anyway when people are difficult.

Love ‘em anyway when you’re not sure how to help the hurt...

Love ‘em anyway when your offerings seem to go unappreciated.

Forgive anyway—others and yourself.

Be kind anyway.

Succeed anyway.

Be honest and sincere anyway.

Create anyway.

Be happy anyway.

Do good anyway.

Give your best anyway.

Be close to God anyway.

Look for the AND and the ANYWAY, and you might just find the amazing and awesome love of God *tugging* on your string, pulling you right off the ground—heart, mind, soul and strength.

Love *that* and dance into the tug with all you are!  
Amen.

Go, my children, with my blessing, Never alone.

Waking, sleeping, I am with you; You are my own.

In my love's baptismal river

I have made you mine forever.

Go, my children, with my blessing - You are my own.