

God's call to Love

The song, *Here I Am, Lord*, is a song many of us know quite well. I've chosen this song to introduce our topic this morning. It is an example of God's love for us and a call for us to love others. I will focus on the lyric of this song (shown in *italics*): "I, who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright. *Who will bear my light [love] to them? Whom shall I send?* Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?"

Jesus is the reason we even know what love is. In laying down His life for us, He taught us everything we need to know about true love. Love is self-sacrificing, generous, unending, not a temporary feeling or attraction. Because of God's love for the world, we know love is also undeserving and often unreciprocated. {Kristi Walker}

Let's look at what scripture says about God's love for humanity. "For God so **loved** the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." {John 3:1} How will people know we are disciples of Jesus? "If you **love** one another." {John 13:35}

Jesus' words were important then, but are they still today? St. Mother Teresa said yes to this question. "There is a terrible hunger for love. We all experience that in our lives - the pain, the loneliness. We must have the courage to recognize it. It might be right in your own family. Find them. Love them."

The remainder of this talk will be using the following acronym to help you put more love into your life.

LOVE: **L** – **Let** go of the past; **Live** in the present; **Look** to the future
 O – **Overlook** the flaws of **Others** and your **Own**
 V – **Validate** other's feelings; **Verify** they are important
 E – **Enjoy** being God's child; **Evangelize**, share that joy with others

L – Let go of the past; Live in the present; Look to the future.

Too often we cling to old hurts, failures, misunderstandings. We hold others (and ourselves) to a higher standard than is realistic. Even St. Paul said his efforts to be Christlike weren't all they should be. {Romans 7} Isn't this true for all of us ... regardless of how long we've been Christians? Despite Paul's failings, he went on to say, "I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back." {Phil 3:12-15 (MSG)}

O – Overlook the flaws of Others and your Own.

Since we all fall short of being Christlike ... the need for forgiveness is very real. Here's where scripture provides some sobering guidance. "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" {Matthew 7:3} The takeaway, we need to realize we are not perfect and neither are our judgments of others. We all need God's love and compassion to help us see others as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Pope Francis encourages us to be loving when dealing with challenges like this. "It is not possible to live without forgiveness, or at least you cannot live well, especially in the family. Every day we wrong each other. ... *what is required of us is to heal the wounds we make straight away. ... If we learn to say we are sorry immediately and to offer mutual forgiveness, the wounds are healed, the marriage is strengthened, and the family becomes an increasingly solid home.*"

V – Validate other's feelings; Verify they are important

Have you ever been talking to someone and realized they were not really listening to you? How did that feel? Was it hurtful, belittling, make you feel they didn't really care? If so, then you know how important it is to feel valued and not just a nobody. We need to understand how our actions can either validate or belittle another person.

All major religions have a version of the Golden Rule to guide us in our dealings with others. “The Golden Rule doesn't tell us what is right from wrong; but helps to keep our judgments and actions in harmony with a caring and positive value system.” (Stephen C Walton) Let’s look at two variations of the Golden Rule that may help us better meet the needs of others when talking with them. The Golden Rule implies the basic assumption that other people would like to be treated the way that **you would like to be treated**. {Matthew 7:12} The Platinum Rule, which is not in the Bible, says: “Treat others the way **they want to be treated**.” So how do we do this?

Steven Covey in his book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, provides meaningful help in this area. His 5th habit is “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Seeking real understanding affirms the other person and what they have to say. That's what they want. That’s what we all want. This concept is nothing new, just think of the Prayer of Saint Francis, where it says, “O Master, let me not seek as much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as **to love**.” Remember, love is self-sacrificing. Seek first to understand the other’s point of view..

E – Enjoy being God’s child; **Evangelize**, share that joy with others

Have you ever thought of yourself as God’s “Beloved”? If not, you should because that is what scripture says we are. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.

Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.” {1 John 3:1-2} Because we are God’s children, we should “**rejoice and be glad in it.**” {Psalm 118:24}

The final lyrics of the *Here I Am* song call us to love God by loving others. **Let our response to God’s question of, “Who will bear my light [*love*] to them?” ... **be** ... “I will go, Lord, if You lead me, I will hold [*love*] Your people in my heart.”**

Reflective Questions:

1. Are you still clinging to memories of the past that are preventing you from living in the moment and striving to be more loving in the future? _____ If so, what do you believe God would ask you to do? _____

2. If you are not always able to pray, “Dear God, please treat me tomorrow as I have treated my brothers and sisters today.” What steps could you take to claim this prayer every day? _____

3. Does the way I spend my time reflect a genuine concern for God and others? _____
If not, what would God want me to do? _____

- If yes, is there anything else God is asking of me? _____

4. Knowing you are a child of God, how does that make you feel? _____
How can you share God’s love with others? _____
