

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 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.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

One of my favorite memories of the 5 pm Saturday outdoor service this summer is when during the sermon I had the congregation try to name the 10 commandments. They kept saying - Love you neighbor and I kept saying - That’s not one of them. And indeed it is not. But it is one that Jesus names as one of the greatest commandments. The first is to love the God with all that you have and the second is to love your neighbor. I was pleased that – love your neighbor- was foremost in people’s minds. It reminds me that we know these commandments. The question is do we live them? How do our lives look different because we go out each day to love God and love our neighbor?

Love is such a casually used word. I love your hair. I love that restaurant. I love that TV show. English has one word for love when love covers a multitude of meanings. Other languages have several words allowing a more precise description of love. I wonder if this lack of words for love minimizes the work we are called to when we are sent out by God into the world to love. As I pondered what it means to love God and love our neighbor, I turned to our presiding bishop’s new book called *Love is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Time* the purpose of which he says is to describe what the way of love looks like.

Bishop Curry begins the first chapter describing one of the faces of love he has encountered in his life. Her name was Josie Robbins and she was the woman who looked after him and his sister when his mother went into a coma and eventually died. She wasn’t a good family friend or a member of his father’s church. She was just a lady who stopped by his church some Sundays to drop off her neighbor’s child before going to her own Baptist church. But she heard about our family’s situation and asked, “How can I help?” She began by ironing a pile of clothes and then gave the children lunch. It grew from there with her showing up as needed sharing many dinners with them, taking them on outings and just being there as his father worked and visited their mom. This relative stranger became a surrogate mom to Bishop Curry and his sister and today is still an integral part of their family.

This week, Pope Francis showed us about love when it was revealed that he said, “Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God,” “You can’t kick someone out of a family, nor make their life miserable for this. What we have to have is a civil union law; that way they are legally covered.” For the Pope to say this when the Catholic Church has recently held the position that homosexuality “an intrinsic moral evil,” and “not to be encouraged “is huge! His words are an action of love and

they have brought much joy and hope to not just LGBTQ Catholics, but many others. However, not surprisingly this action of love will lead to a hard road. Ed Mechmann, director of public policy for the Archdiocese of New York, says I think we have to recognize that the Holy Father has plainly erred.” “Wow,” I thought, “He is questioning the pope.” This is the kind of road loving asks us to walk.

Love is when our pantry volunteers kept showing up in the worst of the pandemic when Perth Amboy was #1 for infections in our county, when the lines were impossibly long and some days the task seemed almost impossible. They showed up to love people who were very much in need.

As Bishop Curry¹ writes, this is not sentimental love but something fierce. This love is a verb: It’s an action, with force and follow-through. When we pull love out of the abstract, really put it to work, it starts to reveal its extraordinary power. How do we keep ourselves focused on this kind of loving? How do we love in a world which seems to get less and less loving every day? How do we be part of the love that has that power to change this world? How do we answer God’s call to love?

It takes intention. Bishop Curry² describes Dr. Martin Luther King’s Ten Commandments of non- violence because he knew that working in loved to become a beloved community required discipline. I am only going to share four. Write them down so you can come back to them later.

1. Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.

We need to have a relationship with the source of love – Jesus, God’s Son. I believe that is why Jesus names the first commandment as love the God with all your heart and soul and mind. When we are connected with the ultimate source our love, our loving flows from us. Read scripture, pray, meditate during a walk, sit and journal – do whatever you can to be in God’s presence on a regular basis.

2. Remember always that the nonviolent movement seeks justice and reconciliation—not victory. Reconciliation, not revenge, is the goal. When it comes to a situation or a conversation is your action uniting or dividing?

3. Seek to perform regular service for others and for the world. Shape up that love muscle. Connecting with others and putting ourselves in their shoes, gets us away from the opposite of love which is selfishness. Let our love create room for the another to be, for another to thrive.

¹ Curry, Michael B. Love is the Way (pp. 19-20). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

² Curry, Michael B. Love is the Way (pp. 93-94). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

4. Refrain from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart. Most of us do not use our fists but violence can come with the tongue and in our hearts. When you have an angry thought, don't judge it. Simply note it—then let it fade from your consciousness. Our presidential election is in 9 days. Our country is divided as ever and I am worried what will happen after the election no matter which candidate wins. There is the possibility of unrest and violence. If there is a time when we need to be the people of God who go out and love in this world, it is in these next few weeks.

This is our work as Christians – to go out and love – each and every day, perhaps each and every hour whether at home, at work, at the grocery, in our neighborhood or on social media. Bishop Curry writes,³ “Imagine, if you will, the impact of each and every person on this planet taking the time to define and then live out loving principles. In fact, imagine 50 percent of everybody doing this, and being successful even half the time. Politics, business and commerce, religious life, and community would be transformed.”

I invite you this day to be part of this intentional loving especially at this challenging time. Go back to the 4 ways I shared before and choose one to start practicing this week. Even if you are already doing it, reflect on how you love through that practice. Love is powerful. When we start letting it loose in this world through our words and actions, we bring this world closer to the beloved community that God desires.

³ Curry, Michael B. . Love is the Way (p. 94). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.