

“Active Love”

Mark 1:15, Luke 6:27-28 & 35-36, Luke 10:25-27, Luke 13:18-21 & Mark 10:27

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Prayer for Understanding Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our eyes to the signs of your presence, open our ears to your voice, and open our minds to your wisdom. Amen.

Jesus began his ministry with a short sermon. **Mark 1:15 NRSV “The kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”** Jesus often repeated this sermon and illustrated it in numerous ways. One aspect of the kingdom of God is being in loving relationship with God and all people. Jesus’ fully-God nature embodied the kingdom of God’s gracious love for all people. God’s love enables us to love so the kingdom of God is near. One experiences the kingdom of God in loving relationships. And yet, the kingdom of God is not here because no one is able to love all people and love God perfectly.

Luke 13:18-21 NLT “Then Jesus said, “What is the Kingdom of God like? How can I illustrate it? It is like a tiny mustard seed that a man planted in a garden; it grows and becomes a tree, and the birds make nests in its branches.” Jesus also asked, “What else is the Kingdom of God like? It is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.”

A little love gives life. Love endures forever. Even a tiny amount of love is magnified by God delivering more abundant life.

One aspect of repent is to turn from unloving to loving. Whenever one chooses to love, more of the kingdom of God is experienced on earth. Last week we explored Jesus’ teaching on how to expand our love. One who sees themselves and their unloving ways realizes they are forgiven by the grace of God. One’s free and unconditional forgiveness heals and fills one with gratitude that inspires them to love extravagantly.

Today, Jesus points out how one often tries to justify limiting their love to certain people in certain situations. The more one strives to love extravagantly, the more one experiences abundant life. The “more love” one shares the “more love” God gives for one to share.

Luke 10:25-37 NLT “One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking Jesus this question: “Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied, “What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?” The man answered, ““You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.” And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!” The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied with a story: “A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. “By chance, a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. “Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I will pay you the next time I’m here.’ “Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

The question that Jesus answered with this parable was, “what should I do to inherit eternal life?” The religious expert lived in a time of a multitude of laws that were initially seeking to guide people in loving God and loving everyone. Many laws struggle to yield love. It is often said, “If you love someone set them free.” The laws that are most beneficial to expanding love often involve freedom. This religious expert was a scholar on the law; we can almost hear his pride and ego in his questions. He was hoping this would be a chance for him to show off his knowledge of the law, to shine before everyone. Surprisingly, part of the Jesus answer is in the question in the word, “do”. The religious expert knows the law, yet he is struggling to “do” the intent of the law. He is in the position of

many people today. Many people know that we are to “love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength, and all our mind.” And, “Love our neighbor as yourself.” The challenge is to actively love everyone. Even the most loving person is unable to fully, completely, perfectly love God, love all people and love self, all the time, in all situations. Our lack of love is why the kingdom of God is near and yet not fully realized. Our earthly life can be wonderful yet is not fully abundant because we sometimes fail to repent, to turn from unloving to loving. Often one has conceptional knowledge and lacks realized understanding that leads to doing. Jesus is trying to help this person repent, to change, to move, from knowledge of the law to doing extravagant love that fulfills the law.

The religious expert is also hampered by “do to get” thinking. He thinks what he does will win him the inheritance of everlasting life. He thinks his action only has value because of the reward he will receive. Jesus subtly corrects his “do to get” with “do this and live.” There is no gap between present and future. The action of love is its own reward. It is not a matter of doing something and then waiting for the reward presumably after death. It is a matter of participating in everlasting life here and now through love. When the religious expert combines realized understanding and illumined acting, they will be experiencing the everlasting life they desire. Everlasting life is in the doing. The kingdom of God is experienced in the present through love. Love focuses on giving rather than receiving. Peace Pilgrim said, “Pure love is a willingness to give without a thought of receiving anything in return.”

Unfortunately, the religious expert even after Jesus’ answer “do love and live” is still stuck in the maze of legal wranglings about boundaries and obligations; therefore, they come back with another knowing question. Who is my neighbor? As the parable begins one can imagine the thoughts of the religious expert. The temple assistant and priest were technically justified by the letter of the law even though they were failing to do the intent of the law to love. The temple assistant and priest were likely weighing their obligations, entertaining an inner debate about what they had to do or what they were excused from doing. If they touched a bleeding body, they would become impure. If the man was not a Jew, then there was no obligation. This fine-print thinking stifles the love of legal minded people. There is plenty of thinking about laws that are supposed to guide us to love and little doing love.

The Samaritan does love. Jesus explains that the Samaritan felt compassion. The Samaritan likely did not know all the laws of the religious experts. One does not need to know any laws to love.

We are left with a sharp contrast the religious leader, temple assistant and priest all know the law yet are unwilling to do love. The Samaritan likely is unaware of the law and yet does love and thereby enjoys everlasting life, abundant life in the moment, and experiences the kingdom of God.

Sometimes compassion flows from realizing one needs love. The Samaritan can imagine being in the beaten, robbed man’s place and does what he hopes someone would do for him in that situation. It is unlikely that the religious expert identified with the beaten, robbed man. He does not see his own need for love. His hope is in the law instead of love.

The compassionate Samaritan is doing love of God and doing love of all people. The Samaritans and Jews were enemies. Jesus taught that love is to have no limits. **Luke 6:27-28 NLT “Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.”** When one is able to do love, reveals they are receiving the grace of God who provides us with compassion to do love for everyone. Without grace it is extremely difficult to love our enemies. When one is in sync with our God of all, one is able to love all. Jesus said: **Luke 6:35-36 NLT “Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for God is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. You must be compassionate, just as God is compassionate.”** The compassion of the Samaritan reveals the compassion of God. The care of the beaten man is abundant with active doing. Soothing wounds, bandaging wounds. Transporting the man to an inn. Paying for his care. The Samaritan puts love into action proclaiming the good news, the kingdom of God, God redeeming grace freely given to all people. The Samaritan, has, and is, experiencing God’s love and compassion. Therefore, despite the hostilities between Jews and Samaritans, the Samaritan sees beyond the hostilities to God’s love for this beaten man. In addition to love for everyone, the Samaritan shows that has no limits. The Samaritan loves with creativity, his property, his money, loving with all his strength. The Samaritan says, “I will pay whatever is needed” revealing God’s limitless love, God’s abundance.

We live in a time when many are finding it difficult to love those who are on the opposite side of an issue. The good news of the parable is you can love everyone, you can love your worst enemy, you can love the person you despise the most. That is good news for you are commanded to love everyone. Doing love. Eating a meal together love. Giving aid love. It might seem impossible. Jesus said: **Mark 10:27 NLT “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.”** That is why the command begins with love God. One’s love of God fills one with compassion, enabling them to do the impossible to love enemies. When you are struggling to

love someone, spend some time, actively loving God, doing something with God. Ponder God's grace for you. God loves you unconditionally. Ponder God's love for this person you are struggling to love. Receive God's love and God will enable you to love everyone.

Today's parable teaches us to do love, to move beyond merely knowing we are to love, to doing specific acts of love. Great transformation happens when we actively live a truth. We can recite, "the Lord is my shepherd" yet it does not become a part of one's being until they live it. Experiencing the care of God. Being renewed by God. Receiving the abundance God provides. Sharing our experiences of God are transformative for they move us from mere knowing to living, from the kingdom of God being near to the kingdom of God being experienced. One can say, "I am saved by the grace of God" and even believe it. The transformation happens when one lives it, they become aware of their unloving ways, receive God's forgiving grace, and respond with grateful extravagant love.

Experienced love was the life of the Samaritan. Upon seeing the beaten man, the Samaritan was moved with compassion to active love. The Samaritan is floating in the river of grace, love is permeating their heart, soul, strength, and mind. The Samaritan's love of God made their active love ready. The beaten man received the love that was pouring into the Samaritan from God. This love was not a strenuous act of will rather a corporation with our abundant God, the source of all love and life.

This way of loving seems exceptional, yet most of us have experienced a time when compassion stirred us to love without thought, a spontaneous movement to include someone, giving to another expecting nothing in return, a love that overflows from us freely.

Loving is co-creating with God. Loving reveals the image of God within us. Loving brings the kingdom of God to earth, for everyone, so all enjoy eternal life. Jesus' concluding words are for you, for everyone, "Now go and do the same." The next step is up to us. Amen