

“Relationships Are Matters of the Heart” - Deuteronomy 6:4-6 – Rev Jeff Childs

Last week we talked about the things we love about the church. There are a variety of responses posted around the building. Today we have asked you to share with us who in the congregation we love because they have first loved us. They have guided us and helped shape us as disciples in our spiritual growth. This morning we begin with a foundational teaching of the Jewish faith found in the Old Testament called the Shema (the Hebrew word for *listen*.) So, listen to it again. *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.”* (Deuteronomy 6:4-6 NRSV)

Do you love God? How do you show that love? ...with all your:

- Heart (Loving) – Today’s focus is that relationships are matters of the heart. Our relationship with God is (or should be) that way. We may express that love from the bottom of our heart through prayer, daily devotions, weekly worship and Bible study.
- Strength (Doing) – We work for the Lord. Whether that is on a mission trip where we may do construction work or clean up after a disaster or offer our time and effort around the buildings or in the various ministries of the church. We put our faith in action with all of our strength together, each doing our part.
- Soul (Being) – This may be the most difficult. To just be. We may often hear the voice in the back of our heads calling us, “Don’t just stand there, do something!” So, we get busy. But hear this voice, “Don’t just do something, just be there.” Sometimes there is nothing to “be done.” We are just to “be there” when we are needed. We are just to “stand up and be counted.” We love God just by being who we are, beloved children of God. After all we are human *Beings*. Be that way.

In the Christian faith, we remember this text in the context of the teaching of Jesus. We learned the Great Commandment (see Matthew 22:37-39) from Jesus who took this Shema and added to it a portion of another verse from the Old Testament *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.* (Leviticus 19:18 NRSV) Jesus taught us that one of the ways we express our love for God is through our love for one another.

The first three gospels have a version of the Great Commandment, but the fourth gospel tells it a little differently. Listen to how Jesus puts it here, *“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* (John 13:34-35 NRSV)

This is a clear expectation of our faith. In fact he taught that this would be the determining factor of how people would be able to recognize disciples or followers of Jesus – by how they loved. It would not be about how smart they were, or how well they dressed. It would not be how pious or how religious they were. It would be how loving they were. With this story we are to love our neighbor not just like we love ourselves as in the Great Commandment. We are to love one another like Jesus loves us! This is a

sacrificial love that sacrifices everything for us on the cross. What are you willing to sacrifice to show that kind of love with all your heart, strength and being to God and to others? You have shared some examples on the “Heart Cards” today, but I see examples all around of those who demonstrate sacrificial love: Parents, grandparents, foster parents raising their children. Rescue workers, soldiers and sailors in harm’s way for their country and community. People giving of their money, time and talents for the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ in the world today and the future tomorrows.

Bishop Robert Schnase wrote: *Every sanctuary and chapel in which we have worshiped, every church organ that has lifted our spirits, every pew where we have sat, every Communion rail where we have knelt, every hymnal from which we have sung, every praise band that has touched our hearts, every church classroom where we have gathered with our friends, every church kitchen that has prepared our meals, every church camp cabin where we have slept—all are the fruit of someone’s Extravagant Generosity. We have been the recipients of grace upon grace. Go and love likewise! Find ways this week to say I love you to God, your family members, friends and even strangers as well. Alleluia and Amen.*

Listen and Hear, O Israel

Jeffrey B. Childs 9/2/2024

Listen and hear, O Israel,
The Lord our God is one.
To us what does this scripture tell?
What word is to be done?

Love God with our heart, soul and strength,
Likewise love our neighbor.
This is the height and breadth and length,
Of our holy labor.

This is the law above all laws,
The one we must obey.
No matter other’s sins or flaws,
Love everyone today.

Forgive and love yourself also,
For God has so loved you.
God sent Jesus that you might know,
As Christ loved, you can too.