

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth  
Sunday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
Rev. Gerry Gallant

What is Love?  
Proper 25  
Matthew 22:34-40

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

O Lord, our Lord,  
there are many places we could go this morning,  
**but we have desired to come to your house.**

There are many voices to which we can listen today,  
**but we desire to hear your voice.**

It would be easy to scatter,  
**but we have chosen to gather.**

We need to behold your beauty,  
**to inquire in your temple,**

to be wrapped in your love,  
**and to experience your renewing Spirit.**

Come close, Lord Jesus,  
**to fill us and renew us. Amen.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Ever present God,  
we thank you for calling us to meet with you today.  
We praise you for coming to us long before we first came to you,  
for knowing who would be here today,  
and for knowing even our motives for coming.  
By your Spirit lead and guide us during this service,  
to help us hear you when you speak  
and to guide our responses with hearts and voices  
that rejoice in your presence. **Amen.**

**Opening Hymn #313: “Oh Worship the King” (V 1,2,5)**

Oh, worship the King, all glorious above;  
 oh gratefully sing God's power and God's love,  
 our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,  
 pavilioned in splendour and girded with praise.

Oh, tell of God's might, oh sing of God's grace,  
 whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;  
 whose chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,  
 and dark is God's path on the wings of the storm.

O measureless Might, unchangeable Love,  
 while angels delight to hymn thee above,  
 thy ransomed creation, in glory ablaze,  
 in true adoration shall sing to thy praise.

**Call to Confession**

Prepare the way of the Lord!  
 Let us make our confession to God.

**Prayer of Confession**

**Merciful God,  
 You created human beings with gifts of intelligence and imagination.  
 Yet we confess we often use these gifts to exploit your creation  
 and put others in their place.  
 So often we think that we are great when we are small.  
 Or we claim smallness when you set a challenge before us.  
 We convince ourselves that our sin is not nearly as great as others,  
 yet, every sin offends your purpose for us.  
 Forgive us, we pray,  
 and grant us a truer picture of ourselves.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends in Christ, God is gracious.  
 Christ has promised that those who humble themselves will be exalted.  
 Having confessed our sin, let us trust the good news of the Gospel.  
 In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

**The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.  
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
 Forever and ever. Amen.**

### **Responsive Reading**

Psalm 1

1 Blessed is the man  
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
 nor stands in the way of sinners,  
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
**2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
 and on his law he meditates day and night.**

3 He is like a tree  
 planted by streams of water  
 that yields its fruit in its season,  
 and its leaf does not wither.  
 In all that he does, he prospers.

**4 The wicked are not so,  
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.**

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

**6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
 but the way of the wicked will perish.**

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 1:1–6.

### **Children's Hymn: "Do Lord, Oh, Do Lord, Oh, Do Remember Me"**

1. Do Lord oh do Lord oh do remember me (sing this three times)  
 Way beyond the blue.

2. I've got a home in glory land that outshines the sun (sing this 3 times)  
 Way beyond the blue

3. I took Jesus as my Saviour you take him too (sing this 3 times)  
 While He's calling you

### **Children's Lesson**

**Prayer for illumination**  
**(Congregant Prepared)**

**Scripture**

**Matthew 22:34-40**

<sup>34</sup> But 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 is the great commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> And 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 great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

**Sermon**

Love. This is perhaps one of the most important and most complex topics that is discussed within the Bible and discussed within Christianity. What is love? We have all heard it repeated from the pulpit and from the mouths of many Christians that the greatest commandment is to 'Love God with all our heart and soul and mind, and also love our neighbor in the same way that we love ourselves. Saying that is simple but how are we to understand what it means to love God and love others, and then how are we called to live it out in our day to day lives. It seems simple, but this greatest commandment is the one that we probably break most often in our lives, because even though saying we love God first is simple, living it is difficult, even though saying we love our neighbor is easy, doing so is often much more challenging than we would hope.

The truth is that this is the most difficulty of all of the commandments that are given in the Bible, it is almost impossible for us to keep this commandment at all times, because it is not just a summary of the ten commandments given to Moses, it is a summary of all of the commandments of God given within the entire Bible, of which there are approximately 613, then add on top of that all of the teachings of Jesus about how we are called to live our lives. When Jesus gave this commandment, he knew that it would be impossible for us to keep, but it is a true summary of the teachings of the Bible, and it is the goal of anyone who wants to live a truly Christ like life to life according to this commandment. It will challenge you in the way you think, the way you act and the way that you understand love, because loving God for all that he has done for us is simple, loving him first is where the challenge lies, after all there are so many things in this world which distract us from God. Then loving our neighbor comes into play, and it is in this part of the greatest commandment that problems arise left and right, we begin to redefine who is our neighbor, after all, Jesus could not have meant everyone, how can we love everyone?

The Pharisees having already been defeated in their first attempt to trap Jesus have come back to try to trick him again. They are trying to force Jesus to pick a single commandment out of the laws of the Old Testament. Their question is phrased in such a way that they believed he would

have no way to wiggle free as he had when they asked him about paying taxes to Caesar, 'Teacher, **which is the great commandment in the Law?**'. However, Jesus is fully aware of their intent, he knows that if he were to choose any of the ten commandments or any of the minor laws of the Old Testament that the Pharisees would then focus on that and then only pay attention to the rest of the commandments in a token manor, paying lip service to them we would say.

So, Jesus once again gives them a response that shows he is one step ahead of their simplistic thinking, '**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**' The Pharisees would not be happy with this answer. Like most of the religious leaders in Jesus's day they were obsessed with the outward appearance of keeping the commandments of God, obsessed with their public appearance and the respect and reverence that the people gave to them. They enjoyed the way that they stood out in public because of their apparent adherence to the Word of God, but Jesus was saying that the outward appearance of obedience to the Word of God does not matter, what actually matters is adhering to God's Word in your heart.

The Pharisees loved to show the people of Jerusalem how Holy they were, and they went to great lengths to show their adherence to God's Word in public, but their hearts were not focused on keeping the Word of God, instead they were focused on keeping up the appearance of adhering to the Word of God so that they could enjoy their position of Power and prestige. The truth is that many of the religious leaders did not hold God's Word in their hearts, instead it was a tool that they used for their own profit and public acclaim. So, when Jesus told them that '**On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.**' He had put them in their place. The commandment to love is the simplest way to look at what Jesus had told the Pharisees. Jesus was telling them that if they truly love God, if they are true believers, then they will love their neighbors, and if they truly love their neighbors, it will show that they truly love God.

Loving God and loving the people around us are closely related.

1 John teaches us:

**1 John 4:7-11**

**<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.**

If we are God's children, we love and because God is love we radiate that love as we walk this earth as His Salt and Light. It is clear from the way that the religious leaders of Jesus's day are depicted in Scripture that they did not radiate the love of God. Instead of radiating love to the

people they seemed to be seeking the love of the people. Instead of radiating love onto the people of God, so that those people would then go forth and radiate that love onto the pagan world and its systems, the religious leaders had sought all the love for themselves and were unwilling to share it with anyone or even God Himself.

So how are we to Love God first on a consistent and regular basis in our lives? That is not a simple task, because that goes against the teachings of this world, which says to place self-first, to place culture first, to place all of its various movements, projects, and teachings ahead of God and his Scripture.

Well truth be told that is exactly what Christianity is about, it is about the Holy Spirit being at work in each of us, slowly transforming us from people who adhere to the ways of the world to people who adhere to the ways of God.

Being a Christian means understanding that we led lives filled with self-importance and sin, it means that we repeat that way of life and that we are seeking to turn away from it and begin a life where we are more Christlike. It means that through the help of the Holy Spirit we are slowly turning, slowly changing from the self-loving, self-lawmaking, self-absorbed sinful people we are into the Christlike beings that God wants us to be, people who radiate his love into the world around us and act as his Salt and Light in a dark and sin filled world.

The Holy Spirit slowly transforms us from the sinful people we were into people who will be ready to meet God in his kingdom one day. The change is not instantaneous, it is slow and filled with challenges, filled with internal and external time of wrestling with our self and our desires, filled with times that are painful as we separate ourselves from the things in this world which led us away from God. Yet it happens, the Holy Spirit is with us through every step of the change, guiding us and giving us the strength, we need to continue, and the path is absolutely unique to each and every Christian as they walk with Christ, and truth be told we never actually reach the sin free state, we never reach perfection, throughout our entire lives we will be struggling against our human nature. However, there will be points when we look back upon our lives and realize just how radically transformed, we are, there will be times that we look back upon our lives before God and can recognize just how much we have been transformed by our faith.

Remember the words of John Newton I shared with you just a few weeks ago, 'I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be. But still, I am not what I use to be. And by the grace of God, I am what I am.'

Loving God first means that we are changing, it means growing in our faith, maturing in our understanding of Scripture, slowly transforming from the self-centered sinful people we are, into the selfless, sacrificing God-centered people we are called to be in this world.

This all begins when we recognize our own sinful ways and repent, when we turn to Christ and accept him as our Lord and Saviour, when we learn to love God ahead of ourselves. From that

moment the Holy Spirit begins its work in us, that slow process of changing us from who we are into who we are called to be, whether we are aware of the changes or not.

Which brings us the second half of the greatest commandment given by Jesus to the Pharisees, **'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'**

Loving God first is already challenging in our lives, how are we supposed to love our neighbors in the same way we love ourselves?

Many people will begin by trying to define what a neighbor actually is, who is it that we are called to love by this commandment?

Let's start with family. We all love our direct family, at least most of the time. Then there is our extended family, sure we love most of them, most of the time. However, if we are truthful there are people within our family that we find it difficult to love at times.

Next, we have our friends, which by the definition of being a friend shows that we love them in some manner. We do love our friends, that is why we call them friends, yet once again if we are honest, we do have times when friends can be hard to love, and we may have had friends that we no longer call friends because truthfully that love is gone.

How about work colleagues, fellow students, and acquaintances. The people that are part of our life but not critical in our relationships. Sure, we care about them in some way, usually in how they impact our lives, but we can hardly say that we love them the same way in which we love our family and friends.

Beyond that we have the millions and millions of people who will be perpetual strangers to us, people who we may walk by once and never see again. The people who live on the other side of the globe who in reality we will never once cross paths with. We can easily say that we love them, because in truth we will never know them, and saying we love someone is much easier than actually doing so.

So how are we to love others as we love ourselves? How can we love strangers when we struggle to love those who are closest to us in this world. God tells us, actually he commands us, to love those people, he commands us to love our enemies in the book of Matthew.

#### **Matthew 5:43-48**

<sup>43</sup> **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'** <sup>44</sup> **But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. <sup>46</sup>For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup>And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup>You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

How can we love our enemies when it is so hard to love our family? We need to begin by understanding that our love is often conditional.

Human nature has made it so we love those who love us, or those who can benefit us in some manner. We love those who can help us in return, or those who have power or influence that may work in our favor someday. Human love is based upon our human nature, and it is limited to self. Human love focuses on what we can gain or lose in a relationship by loving and that is why it is always conditional.

Our human nature results in us loving others as it suits our own self-interests, not as God intends for us to truly love others in this world. We see others in this world as the world intends for us to them, not the way that God sees them. How often do we see our fellow human being as a challenge to overcome or as a human being that needs God's love? The truth is that loving other people as God intends is perhaps one of the most difficult things that God asks for his followers to do.

Loving our neighbor as ourselves means that we would do for others the same things that we would do for ourselves. It means that if they have a need, we attempt to meet that need the same way that we would in our own lives. It is easy to say, but in practice it is very difficult to do. How do we help others like we are called to when we struggle so often to even provide the things, we need for ourselves?

As Christians we know what we are called to do, we want to do what we are called to do, but we find it difficult to start doing it in our lives. Loving others is extremely difficult, we don't like to talk about it with others, in fact we don't even like to think about it ourselves. Ironically, we try to pretend that we want to love like we are called to, because if we were truthful, it would look bad.

Realistically we need to accept that there is no living being on this planet that can truthfully say that they honestly 'love their neighbors as themselves'. Just watch the evening news any day of the week and ask yourselves could you honestly love every person that was on the evening news including the newscasters the same way that you love yourself, could you care for them the same way in which you care for your family. Yet, this is exactly what the Bible is telling us to do, God is asking us to do the impossible, so we pretend to do it even when it is difficult.

It is not until we go back to the first half of the greatest commandment, it is not until we love God first that we can truly begin to love others in that same way. It is not until we understand that God loved us so much that he was willing to die upon the cross for us, for our salvation, before we could even begin to love him.

When we understand that God loved us first, we can begin to understand what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves. When we understand what God was willing to do for us before we



did anything to earn or deserve his love, we can begin to understand what it is that he is asking for us to do in this world as we live a Christlike life.

Yes, it is difficult for us to love others like God asks for us to, but once we understand how much God loves us and God loves the people of this world, we should be more willing to radiate the love that he gave to us to others. Loving others is easier, even loving those which make our lives more difficult is easier, when we know that the love of God is at work in us and at work in them, we learn to deal with them through the love of God that is shared with us.

This is what is meant when we are told to love our enemies, we are called to leave behind all of the feelings and emotions and judgements of this world and instead see the person as God sees them, as a lost child.

However, this does not mean that we tolerate sinful behavior and bad deeds. Loving others does not mean blindly accepting and promoting behavior that goes against the teachings of the Scriptures. Showing love to others means more than just accepting them the way they are, the same way that loving God means not just accepting ourselves the way that we are.

Loving others means radiating love to them, even when they are not worthy of that love' Loving others means being willing to help them move beyond their understanding of who they are in this world to who they are called to be in God's kingdom, and that will mean at times we need to show them love by not allowing them to do things which separate them from God and the eternal joy and happiness that he can bring into their lives.

Loving God with all of your heart, soul and body is not a simple task, loving your neighbor as yourself is definitely a challenge, yet it is what we are called to do. So as God's children in this world perhaps it is something that we should work a little harder at doing. We need to radiate his love, to share love with people who are not already in relationship with God in hopes that by doing so they would begin to realize what it would be like if they were to let God into their lives.

Radiating love is not easy, especially at first, it is incredibly challenging, but it does get easier, and truthfully, we all want it to get to the stage where it is normal. Until we learn to love others the same way that God loves us, we are resisting the will of God and the greatest commandment that was given to us by Jesus Christ as he walked upon this planet.

Radiating the love of God is something that every Christian should aspire to in this world. Loving God first is something that we should all aspire too. The truth is that God is love, and the understanding of His love for us, helps us to learn how we are to love others.

Jesus knew this when he commands us:

**John 13:34-45**

**<sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

When we learn to love others the same way that God loves us, we are living out God’s call in our lives. When we begin to love God first, with all of our heart, soul, body, and mind, it will begin to transform the way that we live and we will finally be able to begin to love others in the same way that Christ loved us, we will finally begin to see the work that God is doing in our lives and in the lives of those around us in this world. We will be walking as the Salt and Light of God in this ever-darkening world.

Let us pray,

**Work in Us True Obedience**

Almighty, eternal, and righteous God,  
we humbly thank you  
for revealing your divine will to us  
in your law  
about what we should do  
and what we should avoid.  
We also humbly pray, for Christ’s sake,  
that you would work in us true obedience,  
graciously forgive us all our sins of negligence,  
and strengthen and lead us  
by your Holy Spirit  
that we begin to serve you  
in new obedience here,  
until we come to complete holiness  
before you in that life to come;  
through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

**Amen.**

*Source: Attributed to Martin Luther, found in Allgemeines evangelisches Gesang- und Gebetbuch zum Kirchen und Hausgebrauch, Hamburg, 1846, p. 436#1.*

**Hymn: “There is One Gospel”**

There is one Gospel on which I stand  
For all eternity  
It is my story, my Father's plan  
The Son has rescued me  
Oh what a Gospel, oh what a peace  
My highest joy and my deepest need  
Now and forever He is my light  
I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

There is one Gospel to which I cling  
 All else I count as loss  
 For there, where justice and mercy meet  
 He saved me on the cross  
 No more I boast in what I can bring  
 No more I carry the weight of sin  
 For He has brought me from death to life  
 I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

There is one Gospel where hope is found  
 The empty tomb still speaks  
 For death could not keep my Saviour down  
 He lives and I am free  
 Now on my Saviour, I fix my eyes  
 My life is His and His hope is mine!  
 For He has promised I, too, will rise  
 I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

And in this Gospel the church is one  
 We do not walk alone  
 We have His Spirit as we press on  
 To lead us safely home  
 And when in glory still I will sing  
 Of this old story that rescued me  
 Praise to my Saviour, the King of life  
 I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ  
 And when in glory still I will sing  
 Of this old story that rescued me  
 Praise to my Saviour, the King of life  
 I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ  
 Praise to my Saviour, the King of life  
 I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ  
 I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

### **Invitation to Offering**

#### **Offering**

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We

also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

**E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. [standrewspert offering@gmail.com](mailto:standrewspert offering@gmail.com) If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.**

**Offertory Prayer**  
**(Congregant Prepared)**

**Closing Hymn# 321: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" (V 1,2,4)**

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, who rules all creation!  
My soul, praise God who alone is your health and salvation!  
Come, all who hear, sisters and brothers draw near,  
join in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who in all things so wondrously reigning;  
hides you with sheltering wings, ever gently sustaining!  
Have you not seen how your heart's wishes have been granted  
through God's kind ordaining?

Praise to the Lord! And with all that is in me adoring,  
All who have life and breath, come with glad praises outpouring!  
Let the Amen sound from God's people again;  
now are forever adoring!

**Pastoral Prayer**

Almighty God,  
be gracious to us and bless us  
and make your face to shine upon us,  
that your way may be known upon earth,  
your saving power among all nations.  
Empower all the peoples to praise you, O God,  
that the nations may be glad and sing for joy.  
For you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon earth.  
Enable all the peoples to praise you, O God,  
for the earth has yielded its increase  
and you, our God, have blessed us.  
We ask that you will continue to bless us  
so that all the ends of the earth will revere you. **Amen.**

**Benediction**

May you, people of God, know that  
God our Father made you and guides your every step;  
Jesus Christ gave his life for you and brings you new life;  
the Spirit keeps you in the Lord's presence and empowers you to serve.  
May almighty God continue to bless you and move you to give thanks. **Amen.**