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Matthew 5:38-44 & Leviticus 24:17-20
July 10, 2022

Who do we Love?

We're moving away from our love of each other to God's love for all creation.

Good Morning, Church.

Look around you. These are your friends or soon-to-become friends. The people around you are your church family. Some people here would drop everything to come to your defense, to rescue you when you get into a difficult place. And like I said a month ago, we can talk about theology and agree to disagree, but if someone came after one of you, so say you're not good enough. I'm pretty sure I would see red and argue against that person until I was blue.

That is love. (pause) But is that the kind of love that Jesus calls us today?

Please pray with me. Lord, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, Our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

What is love anyway?

The word, love, is something we toss around in casual conversation. We say "I love you" to spouses, family, and friends. We may love a dress or a movie. But in church we say funny things like love your neighbor and your enemy. And brothers and sisters, this is weird, that we use the same word "love" for a romantic partner and someone worth fearing. So today, let us not speak about love as a feeling, but more as a verb.

Some of you remember the 2017 MC USA orlando convention's tagline was love is a verb. And that is true enough. We practice love love in our actions, in how we live our lives together. It was love that nudged Ruth to follow her mother-in-law back to Isreal. Love clothes the naked, takes care of the sick, visits the prisoner. John 13 reads your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. Love is a force, pushing and pulling us to action for the sake of one another.

I believe that both Jesus and Leviticus are about love. Or rather, are commands on how to shape our love in more productive ways.

How does Leviticus tell us to love?

Sermon 1

When someone hurts you or hurts someone close to you. Our love pushes us to anger. This anger can bubble over and we strike back at the person who hurt us. Like I said in the beginning. It is hard for me to play it cool when someone is hurting people I love. In the Old Testament, when someone kills your relative, the loving thing to do was to take revenge. this kind of revenge love was called being the goel hadam, or in english the avenger of blood.

An eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth is supposed to take that revenge love and temper it with compassion. Yes, take your revenge, but make that revenge equal to the harm done. Consider with me what would happen if our love for relatives caused us to take a life for a tooth. Then we would take increasingly drastic revenge on each other, until two families hated each other so much that they forget why they were fighting in the first place.

So in steps Jesus, "I know the law says don't escalate violence against your enemies, but I'm telling you do not resist an evildoer." But Jesus, how can we love ourselves if we don't take revenge? Turn the other cheek? Give up your coat? Go the second mile? To tell you the truth, I argue against Jesus's command because I am afraid. I fear, this command would invite my enemies to keep slapping me. I know that this passage has been misused to tell the powerless to forgive governments and hate groups that will continue to kill them. I hold no judgment for anyone who cannot hear any redemption in this passage.

Then I thought about how in Leviticus, love for our relative is what inspired the goel hadam, avenger of blood. But what would happen if we became goel hadam for our enemies as well? What if returning an eye for an eye would make the world blind? What if instead, we gave sight to people who deserve to be blinded? Mercy to the merciless.

What happens when we realize that our enemies are made in the image of God, are beloved children of God? Then striking back no longer makes sense. Because if God sends rain upon the righteous and unrighteous alike. So is Jesus calling us to imitate God's love for all of creation? Would that spread mercy throughout our churches and communities?

Besides, who are we that we know when to return an eye for an eye, a life for a life or when to not resist an evildoer? Scripture gives us these two perspectives. Sometimes justice should roll down like waters and stop the injustices that scar our world. Sometimes, we should not resist an evildoer because doing so would only deepen the wound. You will know which by its fruit.

I am reminded by a quote from Lord of the Rings about mercy. “Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends.”