

Sermon: The Law of Love

Texts: Matthew 22: 34-46; Leviticus 19: 1-2. 15-18

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The Law of Love is so profound, that to add ideas seems unnecessary.

To love the self – but not only the self, for if we only love the self we will walk through this world oblivious to the limitations of natural resources, the interconnection of all living things, and that the best of humanity is in collaborative community.

To love others - but not only others, for if we only love others we will give without replenishing and run dry, we will manipulate the giving to fulfill our unmet need, we will become so dependent that care would turn into control and it is in freely giving and receiving that we are inwardly graced. To love others only is more about attachment – which impersonates love – “I will love you if you give me what I need”.

To love God – the most abstract of the three – some would say it’s the backend of loving neighbour and loving self. But to give and receive love from the God of our understanding, balances out the opposition of the two – the power struggle between self and other – and God is the Source of all Love – dynamic and generative.

So this morning instead of adding ideas, I am going to share some stories of living out the dynamics of love.

The first two stories comes from a book called The Five Invitations – Discovering what Death can teach us about Living Fully by Frank Ostaseski.

When Frank was in his late teens, he taught swimming to children with severe disabilities. Jasmine was a beautiful 16 year old, she lived with spina bifida. Frank writes that she would have been the home coming queen if she wasn’t so self-conscious about the way the disease contorted her body. She refused to put on a bathing suit to swim.

But she loved to sit on the side lines, watch the swimmers and make wisecracks.

Frank spent months encouraging her to give swimming a try. Each day he would playfully reflect back to her the strength, courage, sense of adventure and beauty he saw radiating from within her.

He writes: “When someone believes they are beyond love, you cannot convince them that they are loved – sometimes it’s necessary to reteach [someone] their loveliness”.

One summer day, Jasmine slipped out of her wheelchair and onto the raised marble ledge of the pool. Weeks later, she took off her braces and orthopedic shoes to dip her toes in the water. And after six months she showed up in her turquoise bathing suit.

For Frank, that day was part of his journey to discover love. He says he discovered love through the acts of kindness, not offered to him, but coming from him. Love taught him to love.

Story number two:

Later in the chapter, Frank tells a story about Carl. A man who was in hospice dying from stomach cancer.

He writes: “the boundlessness of love are made evident when the veils between this world and the invisible world are thinnest” – he names birth and death as two such moments.

Carl’s story of dying is an example of this.

Frank describes Carl as a homegrown philosopher – he asked so many questions and was always eager to learn and grow. He listened generously to any who would share their lives with him.

Carl’s morphine pump that he was using to manage the pain left his mind foggy and he was looking for another way to manage to the pain. He asked Frank about the practice of mindfulness meditation. In meditation, he was encouraged to enter the pain, for pain would be his teacher. Frank taught Carl to notice the pain and stay with it, and then move his attention to his breath. Carl was determined but the pain was too much for him.

They needed to find another way.

Frank put his hands on Carl’s belly and encouraged him to feel into the space between the centre of the pain and the warmth of his hands. It still hurt. Frank began to pull his hands away, creating more and more space, inviting Carl to release the pain into the space that he was discovering.

With a sigh, Carl spontaneously said: That feels better, I am resting in Love.

Frank writes: “Carl had found the reliable resource in Love that he could draw from when he needed to. Love was always already present and in ample supply within him”.

Rest in Love. Rest in Love.

The third story comes from a book called *Accidental Saints* by Lutheran pastor Nadia Boltz Weber:

She shares of a time when she was asked to take a funeral of a young man who had died by suicide. Preparing for the funeral, Nadia listened to the family tell stories of this young man’s life – they were both frustrated by and totally in love with their wild brother and son.

Nadia asked some questions and then there came a lull in the conversation. And she intuited that they wanted to her to say something pastor-ly.

She said: it sounds like you loved him well. And if your love alone could have kept him alive, he would still be here. Love is sacred, but human love is never pure or perfect.

Despite all the love in the world, when it comes down to it, none of us can know the reality of another. We can share circumstances, personality traits, even parents, yet as much as we move through our lives alongside each other, none of us can fully know the internal reality of another. The way others perceive love, receive love and love themselves. This is beyond us.

To love our selves, to love others, to love God. A balance of three.
How do you live this balance?

Amen.