

Worship Service “*Love Triangle*”

22th Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, 29th October, 2023

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 (4) NLT / Matthew 22:34-46 NSRV

Prelude (video)

[*We Give Thanks Unto You*](#)

Posted to YouTube by Annie Center

Opening Music(video)

[*In Christ Alone*](#)

written by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend

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Welcome / Announcements

Pass the Peace (video)

[*For We Are Strangers No More*](#)

Posted to YouTube by Annie Center

Opening Hymn (video)

[*Holy Spirit Come With Power*](#) - 26

Posted to Youtube by University Mennonite Church

Call to Worship (responsive)

One: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

All: And also with you.

One: Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

All: Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

One: Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

All: Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Bless his holy name.

One: Give thanks for the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations.

Invocation

Eternal God, whose signature we see, if we dare to look, in the creation of the universe, help us this hour to look and to listen for Your handwriting and Your voice in this place, among these people.

Connect our temporary praise to Your timeless rhythms, Your ageless melodies, Your everlasting joyful noise.

Guide us now to focus upon You, knowing that in You, our distractions become new possibilities for action.

Breathe life into our singing, our praying, our speaking, our listening, our touching, that all these activities might become more than they are. In our worship we reach out to You, O God, knowing that You have already enfolded us in Your arms. In Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Epistle Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 NLT

You yourselves know, dear brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not a failure.

You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare his Good News to you boldly, in spite of great opposition.

So you can see we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery.

For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts.

Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know. And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money!

As for human praise, we have never sought it from you or anyone else.

As apostles of Christ we certainly had a right to make some demands of you, but instead we were like children among you. Or we were like a mother feeding and caring for her own children.

We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too.

A Time of Prayer

Sharing Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Creator God, we come before you asking prayers for those who lead Nations, Cities, Churches, homes.

As you poured out your love in the Word may we hear your word and follow; may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts lead us to you.

Holy One, we come before you - a people broken into shards of lives Sick, Poor, Hungry hidden by the limitations of our eyes.

Help us to see as You see as you poured out your love in the Word. May we hear your word and follow may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts lead us to you. God of Mercy, we come before you – seeking to live as you command, but often failing, and thus we are torn by cries of despair, Anger, Power, Control, lost to foolishness and stumbling blocks despite your love in the Word

Help us to hear your word and follow. May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts lead us to you.

Gentle God, we come before you giving thanks for all our blessings the gift of life. Hope, Faith, Love, Family, friends, all we care for this day. Help us to be Your hands.

Incline Your heart, O gracious God, and teach us to love O Christ, our rock and our Redeemer. **Amen.**

Hymn (video) [*When Peace, Like a River*](#) **336**

Written by Horatio Gates Spafford, Larry Visser, and Philip Paul Bliss
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Gospel reading **Matthew 22:34-46 NRSV**

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together,

and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.

‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’

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.’”

This is the greatest and first commandment.

And a second is like it: “‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’”

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question:

‘What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?’ They said to him, ‘The son of David.’

He said to them, ‘How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

“‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet’”’?

If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?’

No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Message - *Love Triangle* - Rev. Glenn Brumbaugh

When we think about what is most important to us, what our focus in life is, what comes to mind? A lot of us would probably say our family or our friends, while others may put their careers first. Certainly I’m sure our faith would probably rank high on the list as well. How we answer that question may change as we journey through life. Our family, our friends, our job, even our faith, may take center stage at different times in our lives. Sometimes it may be a little difficult to tell what is at our center. We may say it is our children, but discover too late that, from all the missed suppers and trips away from home, they could not tell that was the case. We may say that it is our faith, but wonder if anyone from the outside notices anything that is different about us because we are Christian.

One way to tell what is at our center is to pay attention to the rules we make for ourselves. These may be formal rules, but often they are more informal things we do not name but regularly follow. For example: “Put 10 percent of your paycheck into savings.” “Always be home in time to read to the kids.” Paying attention to the rules we make is revealing, because by and large the rules we live by orient us to our center, to what is most important, to what we want to make sure we attend to.

The same was true in Jesus' day. So perhaps it is not surprising that one of the Pharisees asked Jesus which rule, or commandment, is most important. What stands at the center of the kingdom Jesus preaches about? Consistent with his responses to other tests offered by religious authorities in this section of Matthew, Jesus does not give him the clear answer he expects. Instead of one core commandment, Jesus responds with two.

The first commandment, "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind," is probably the most well-known part of the Torah. Called the Shema, it is probably the most prominent prayer in the Hebrew tradition. It could well be called the cornerstone of Jewish faith and practice; its importance in that faith cannot be overstated. While often used as a prayer, it is more a defining statement of who God is, "the Lord our God is One." It states the monotheistic nature of Israel's God that set that deity apart and above the pagan gods of the neighboring cultures of the Near East.

The Shema reinforces this basic truth about God and in turn, commands Israel to love the Lord with everything they've got. This command and truth about God are intricately linked. Because God is One, you shall love the Lord with the entirety of your being. The Lord is distinct from all the pagan deities in unique Oneness, and as a result you may love the Lord without reservation. There is no competition with any other gods. This special relationship between God and Israel is what set them apart, made them unique, made them feel special. That answer would be respected by the elders and scholars in attendance. But that was only the first part.

Jesus adds, "a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these commandments hang all the law and the prophets." That addition would have thrown the religious authorities, for sure. By adding this second commandment, with the implication that it is "like" the first, not only threatens the exclusivity of the Jewish nation's relationship with God, it implies something about the nature of God.

There is an intimate connection between the two, a unity, as if they were two sides of the same coin. There is no love of God without love of neighbor, and love of neighbor is love of God. Also implicit here is the recognition that love of neighbor is inextricably tied to a properly ordered self-love. One cannot give oneself away in love to God and neighbor if a healthy self has never been formed in the first place.

To many of the Pharisees, this image of God is at once unsettling and a stumbling block. If the God of Israel loves all nations as much as Israel, then everything about their identity is threatened. If God esteems all people groups as God's chosen, and requires a corresponding love by the chosen people, are the Pharisees now supposed to love others as much as themselves? They have spent a great deal of time narrowing and outlining exactly who qualifies as a neighbor worthy of such love, those who are essentially just like themselves. Now are they called to love the unclean and rejected as

much as Jesus loves them? This upends their entire concept of what faith is. Instead of a binary system involving just love of self and love of God, they are now faced with a triangular perspective: love of God, love of neighbor, love of self.

This is the triadic habit of thought and practice to which Jesus calls us. It is a calling to reflect on every issue, every decision, every action, in this triangular way, to ask in all things: how are we loving God and neighbor and self in this? This is the question that should attend our discernments as individuals and as communities of faith. Whether in how we allocate resources, what constitutes creative and faithful worship, or what the proper relationship is between the church and state, or any of the countless other issues we must sort through in our daily walks of faith: we must discern how we might love God and neighbor and self in all that we say and do. Unfortunately, we live in a culture that entices us to begin and end with rugged individualism: what are my needs, my rights, my desires? What will bring me self-actualization and contentment? Sadly, this kind of thinking has gotten us to the point in which we find ourselves now. How do we promote the common good when our center is focused solely on what gives ourselves fulfillment?

The results are all too easy to see: the fracturing of society, the vitriol in our public discourse, our culture-centric behavior that has led to the suffering of others, human and creation alike. It seems like everything revolves around a “me” perspective: my rights, my lifestyle, my country. We see it in political groups in our own country, and particularly in the conflicts in Palestine and Ukraine that dominate our news stories of late. Even within the body of Christ, we often incorporate this expressive individualism.

Our congregations often succumb to the temptation to turn from self to God without consideration of neighbor. Thus we begin with our needs as sinner and end with God’s salvation in Christ, cleanly circumventing the hurting neighbor. The church, however, is called to cultivate the habit of triadic reflection and practice, to recognize that no discernment is complete until love of God and neighbor and self has been expressed. Thus the mission of the church is all the more critical in the self-focused, troubled world in which we live.

We must hear the stories, stories that render another way of being in the world, a way free of self-absorbed delusion and despair, a way that opens out to neighbor and ultimately to the God who is the source and end of all things. Our lives and the life of the world depend on us picking up the habit, of joining into this love triangle and living in relationship with each other and our Creator.

I hope and pray we can find ways to step outside ourselves in everything we say, think, and do, and model caring for ourselves, and others in a world where so many find themselves so isolated, alone, and despondent. May we be the light in the darkness they seek. Amen.

Call to Serve

With what you see before us, God, we demonstrate our deepest love.
Receive our gifts – our very best – as sweet offerings before you.
May they be the blessing to others that they have been for us. Amen.

A Time for Reflection (Video) [*Ave Maria*](#)
Posted to Youtube by Annie Center

Prayer of Thanksgiving

We thank you, God, for coming to us as a neighbor, a stranger, an immigrant, binding our wounds and carrying us to safety, so that we might love you with all our heart, soul, and mind, and welcome the stranger, loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Hymn (video) [*Move In Our Midst*](#) **418**

Written by Perry L. Huffaker and Robert Lau,
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Benediction

Hear this: the Lord our God is the one and only Lord. Therefore go out into the world and love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love others as you love yourself.

And may God give you justice and freedom; May Christ Jesus set you free for love; and may the Holy Spirit go where you go.....and protect you on your way.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord, ...**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

Postlude (Video) [*Come, Let Us All Unite To Sing*](#)
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