

Sunday, August 22, 2021

A Sermon by Rev. Dawn Allen-Herron, with  
The People of St. Mary's, Anchorage

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 6:1-12; Psalm 84; Matthew 22:34-40

### *Essentials*

A few of you may have recognized that the First Reading and the Gospel that we have heard this morning are not, in fact, “appointed for today.”

I have chosen them, instead, because they are the Scriptures that have anchored my own meditations this extraordinary week.

As I have prayed

- for the people of Afghanistan,
  - for veterans of this 20-year war,
  - for refugees—both popular and unpopular,
- for Haiti,
  - for those working on repairing and building,
- for children, teachers, bus drivers, administrators returning to school,
  - and for parents who've made decisions about where and how to send them;
- for relationships of my own, and others...

So much, in one week....and the Scripture that bubbled up, first,

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Here is, of course, a part of what Jesus calls the greatest commandment.

Interesting, a *command*-ment, because I recognize that sometimes I’ve used “Love your neighbor” as a weapon against those who understand HOW to love differently than I do.....

which points, for me, to how difficult the living out is.

Even when it’s very clear that I’m to love,

It is NOT always clear HOW to love....or what that means I’m to DO.

The Delta variant, our common fatigue (and anger), Afghanistan, Haiti...each of these has reminded me, this week, how complex loving is.

Let’s look more closely at the teaching.

First, “love your neighbor,” for Jesus, is tied to “Love God.” We often jump to the end of the book here, skipping over the first great commandment, which is “Love God, with your whole heart, and soul, and mind/strength.”

Much has been made of how impossible it is to love God w/out loving neighbor....but increasingly, I wonder if we also eviscerate the commandment by skipping the “love God” part.

Duane read for us one of the early versions of the first of the Great Commandments. A few notes from that reading:

- love of God, like all loves, is not simply “on our hearts.” Rather, it is
  - on our feet, and forehead;
  - taught to children;
  - talked about at home, and away
    - when lying down, and when arising;
  - written on doorposts and gates—the places we see every day.

Like all loves, love of God implies that we get to know the other.

Here, I suggest, is a key to why loving God and loving neighbor cannot be un-linked.

Here, in Deuteronomy (and throughout the Hebrew Scriptures), command to love God includes reminders of *who* God is and *what* God has done.

- “brought you into a land that I promised.”
- “cities you did not build, houses with goods you did not gather...vineyards you did not plant....”
- “brought you out of slavery.”

Loving God/Knowing God reminds us that God’s Love involves JUSTICE, and MERCY, and RESPONSIBILITY, and GRACE

Which is to say,

It's complicated.

Whatever else it means to love, in each concrete circumstance of our lives,

The God of Sarah, Rahab, and Deborah commands to a righteous love that cannot be separated from justice, grace, responsibility, and mercy.

This does not make things simpler, of course,

But it makes the task worth our lives.

Why commit ourselves to something so difficult?

Why set ourselves up for this sort of failure?

The farther I go in this Story,

The Deeper I live into it,

The more I see that as we roll up our sleeves for the task of loving,

We uncover hands that are not clean,

And that we are unable to wash clean on our own.

But, as Jürgen Moltmann has said,

*“we can open our guilty, fearful hands,*

*Just as they are, and receive the beauty of God's grace.”*

Into outstretched hands,

God places nourishment.

Outstretched hands find can grasp another's, and HOLD ON,

And work together

To build the world of God's dreaming,

And to celebrate the small moments,

Day by day,

That this Dream is visible to us.