

How Can We Love With Our Whole Selves?

Fellow bearers of the image of God – the imprint of Love, I invite us to wonder together this morning: How can we love with our whole selves? God's love draws us together this All Saints Sunday morning, two days before momentous elections in our nation. We come together via livestream and in our house of worship – on land which Dakota peoples and others have loved for millennia before us and which we hope others will cherish into the future. As we move into this time of wondering, let's first pause to pray.

Holy Spirit, as you enfold us in your communion of saints (including both those who have departed from this world and those whose company we appreciate today), expand our capacity for love as we wonder about how we can love with our whole selves. Fill our hearts and our minds with your peace as you reveal to us our next loving movements forward. Amen.

Fellow seekers, today's scripture readings invite us to wonder about wholeness in two ways:

- First, is there wholeness in the form of **integrity** in your loving? Do your heart, mind, soul and strength communicate a cohesive purpose and message of compassion? Do you love with the wholeness of integrity?
- Second, is there wholeness in the form of **authenticity** in your loving? Is love's strong hold on your being what fuels the apparent goodness in your feelings, thoughts, convictions, and efforts? Or is there too much hot air propelling your movements? Do you love with the wholeness of authenticity?

I recently experienced my son Sam sharing love with his whole self. And he has given me permission to share this story with you. Sam presented me with this card he had made for me while at school. On the front of this piece of blue construction paper, he drew a blue heart filled in with brown. Inside he wrote, *“Mom, I love you. Sam Gromoll (exclamation point)!”*

Delighted by this gift and noting that Sam had colored in all of the space immediately surrounding each letter of each word, I approached him with curiosity, *“Sam, I love this card you drew for me. And I’m wondering - why did you choose to fill in all your letters?”*

Sam paused what he was doing, looked at me, held his hands open and said, *“That’s because I love you too much!”*

Friends, I hope that the whole-self **integrity** and **authenticity** of a letter-filling-in “too-much” kind of love will show up in your life today. And I hope that we will make ourselves ready to serve as channels for that kind of love. **I wonder: Who is one saint (one beloved bearer of God’s loving image) who has shown you an integrated, authentic, too-much kind of love?** I encourage you to acknowledge it inwardly, give thanks to God for that person, and let them know how they have impacted you (whether you are speaking to them because they are alive or while they are dead).

Let’s turn to our scripture readings for today, mining them for the wisdom they might offer. Toward the beginning and end of the reading from Deuteronomy, we receive reminders and encouragements to practice Love in particular ways and in many contexts - meditating on God’s word, discussing with family members and others about the principles of our faith, sharing our values publicly.

Moses reminded his community long ago and us today: *“The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”* **I wonder: In which context do you sense the Holy Spirit urging you to commit with more integrity and authenticity?** Is it in your private meditations and prayer life, your interactions with close family and friends, or is it by letting your faith show up and speak up in public?

Richard Rohr, a Christian mystic and Franciscan priest writes of how our living must actively bear witness to the Love of God. Rohr writes this: *“Christianity is a lifestyle—a way of being in the world that is simple, nonviolent, shared, and loving. However, we made it into an established religion (and all that goes with that) and avoided the lifestyle change itself. We could be warlike, greedy, racist, selfish, and vain throughout most of Christian history and still believe that Jesus is our personal Lord and Savior or continue, in good standing, to receive the sacraments. The world has no time for such silliness anymore. The suffering on earth is too great.”* Words of wisdom from Richard Rohr. **I wonder: Is there a change, a shift you need to make in your lifestyle such that is more fully reflects your core belief in God’s love?**

This week, the Psalmist moved my spirit by the way they bask in God’s love as we might bask in the comforting warmth and energizing light of the sun. The Psalmist conveys how they long for, seek, focus on, and move with the way of God’s love. And they describe how this might lead to happiness or blessing (the Hebrew word here is *ashhar* – blessed or happy). *“Happy are those who keep God’s decrees, who seek God with their whole heart, who also do no wrong but walk in God’s ways.”* **I wonder: Who in your life models a send of happiness grounded in the integrity and authenticity with which they carry their whole loving self?**

And, finally, the writer of the gospel of Mark invites us to observe the type of mutually appreciative dialogue Jesus often had with respected Torah scholars. Jesus builds upon the greatest commandment (that of loving God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength). Jesus fleshes it out by bringing the living, breathing self and the living, breathing other into the mix along with our more mysterious concept and experience of God. Jesus says, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

A member of our congregation shared with me this week a powerful quote from the late Leo Buscaglia. Since childhood, I have known him as author of the beautiful book for all ages, *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf*. Buscaglia was also a motivational speaker and a professor in the Department of Special Education at the University of Southern California.

Buscaglia writes this about the very real impact of loving our neighbor as ourself: *"The majority of us lead quiet, unheralded lives as we pass through this world. There will most likely be no ticker-tape parades for us, no monuments created in our honor. But that does not lessen our possible impact, for there are scores of people waiting for someone just like us to come along; people who will appreciate our compassion, our unique talents. Someone who will live a happier life merely because we took the time to share what we had to give. Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have a potential to turn a life around. It's overwhelming to consider the continuous opportunities there are to make our love felt."* Words of love and wisdom from Leo Buscaglia. **I wonder: will each of us welcome God's holy loving Spirit to move through us in coming ways such that others will feel God's love through us?**

I'd like to close by sharing an experience of a song that I first heard in the summer of 2002. I was a summer camp counselor at Mt. Cross Lutheran Camp near Santa Cruz, CA, and in the middle of the redwood forest. I worked there two summers in a row. And my friend Craig Oldenburg, who was somewhat of a master on ropes courses and leading groups through experiential learning, wrote and shared this song inspired by scriptures (our greatest commandment for today). I invite you to close your eyes if it helps you to hear it. I'm gonna sing it.

*"At times I close my eyes and forget the holiness I knew
Still I would love to love you deeply –
Please woo be back to you
With all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, with all my strength
– Let me love you, Lord. Let me love you."*

May we be channels of that love with our whole selves, because that Love is counting on us. Amen!

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Deut. 6:1-9, Psalm 119:1-8, Mark 12:28-34