

**Mark 12:30...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength**

Love is a concept on which fortunes are made—one where the music and entertainment industry play on our emotions for financial success. What is love? Yes, it's an emotion, but more so it is a reflection of our relationships. In the case of the Mark scripture, it is Jesus' answer to a scribe on which commandment is primary...or maybe, the best commandment. Jesus cites the "Shema" from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. There, love is more than an emotion; it is the fullness with which commitment is made to God.

In Lent, such "love" also is reflective of obedience. Contrary to all our own inclinations, Jesus will follow what God decides on his death over loving his own life. Love will be a place where the will and purpose of God must take precedent over self-interest and self-will. In the world, we like that concept. It is the sacrificial. It is in caring for children and parents. It is the soldier that falls on the grenade to save his comrades. It is the mother who does not eat so that her child has a meal when little to no food is in the house. In movies, it is that gripping scene where the central character runs into the burning house for his lady love (or some variant on that commitment).

We want love that shows the "nobility of character" to be true. It makes us trust that love is indeed powerful enough to be SELFLESS, to decide despite the risk, and to forget the more comfortable result in favor of what is necessary. That involves seeing what others may not (like that grenade thrown in the foxhole) and taking action. Love does the hard things. Certainly, the cross makes the measure of love VERY HIGH. Yet, love is the calling in Lent. More than fasting and prayer and alms giving, loving others above one's own interest stands at the center of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. The disciplines are not a self-expression, but a selfless expression of doing without, holding others before God over our needs, giving because it is a natural reflection of Christ working within our lives.

That sounds very theatric. Mel Gibson thought so too and used it in his "Passion of the Christ" to contrast the brutality of our humanity to Jesus' own humility (and humiliation). Is love always that grand? Can't it equally be found in something more mundane like getting up for Peter's Porch. Self interest might be 'enjoying Saturday morning' and 'sleeping in' after a long week of work. Helping other people is not unusual AND is hardly the grenade thing or cross. Yet, love is the ALL we do and ALL we are—and how we serve. It is our heart bent towards others. It is a soul that allows the Spirit to take form in our work and play. It is a mind that conforms itself to serving God. It is the strength to do what is needed. Love is living as if God is our heart and soul and mind and strength.

As we travel through Lent, will you make that journey for others and with others?

We will be hosting a Good Friday Café (a death café event underpinned by Christ's death on the cross) to think about our attitudes on death. I think it is a form of love. Is Good Friday just a story? My peer pastors say they don't do a Good Friday Service because there is little interest. We hold Tenebrae. I think a discussion on our ideas (and maybe misconceptions) of death make Good Friday relevant because we will have our own "good friday" (yes—all lower case) someday. Maybe, it is a day where love and death have a partnership.

*With blessings, Pastor Joe*