

I want to invite you to imagine something with me. Imagine Jesus standing in Jerusalem in the temple courts talking to a few people. If you don't have any idea what that massive ancient temple looked like, imagine Jesus sitting on the top steps of the Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C. Imagine now a religious expert, who has been sent by an unhappy and suspicious-of-Jesus group of religious experts, approaching Jesus in the temple. Imagine the religious expert asking Jesus a question, a question that is aimed at Jesus for one reason: to trap him. A question like a professor comes up with at the end of the semester to test what you know and how you think.

We need to know two things: the man's question was loaded with political implications, and Jesus' future hinged on his answer. Here's what the religious expert asked: Of all the commandments (and mind you there are 613 commandments in the Old Testament), which is the most important?

What Jesus said in response teaches everyone who wants to be his faithful follower exactly how to orient every moment of every day: “Love God- with all your heart, soul, mind, and ability, and love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Mt. 22:37-40)

The whole Torah (law), not just part of it but the whole thing from Genesis to Malachi, will be done if every day we love God with every molecule and love others as we love ourselves. Go ahead and read the Old Testament. And after, read the New Testament. Everything God shares or tells you and everything Jesus embodies and teaches is either a love God or love others command.

(Illustration from *The Jesus Creed for Students* by Scot McKnight)

Love is the currency of faithfulness.

Love is...? How would you complete a sentence that begins with “Love is...”? Would you turn immediately to 1 Corinthians 13, to what is known as the apostle Paul's love chapter, in which it defines God's ultimate love for us? Love is patient, kind, does not boast or envy, forgives, trusts. Would you turn to the symbolism of the cross as an example to define love? Love is sacrificial, faithful, humble, meek, serving others. Do you think of love more as a force? A force

of action, of transformation, of power, of motivation, or risk (courage)? Love is...? It is worth asking ourselves and putting ourselves to the test as Jesus was.

In the John 14 text we read a moment ago, Jesus teaches about love and what he says is paramount to our understanding of what love is. In essence, what Jesus says is 'where love is, Jesus and the Father are at home.' Wherever we might find love, true love, we find Jesus. Wherever we might experience love, true love, we experience God. And because we would say that God, Christ, is love, we can also offer the reverse. Wherever we find Jesus we find love and wherever we experience God we experience love. To say this is to declare that there is no true love apart from God. To say this is to also declare that the absence of true love suggests the absence of the relationship that brings true love. A definition or example of love that is inconsistent or contrary to the nature and character of Jesus and God is not true love, for true love is only found in God and our relationship with God.

The Currency...? What is currency? By definition we might think first of currency being a system of money in use for economic exchange or we may even think of currency as a fact or quality of being generally accepted and in use. I would like to suggest for today, since love is the object of the currency, we consider currency to be how we invest, prove loyalty and commitment to, or give back to God.

It is likely that you have heard the phrase "Pay it forward." The concept is rather simple. Someone does something kind to you, like gives you something, offers you assistance, or helps you out of a difficult circumstance, and rather than paying them back directly with the same thing, you pay the act of kindness or benevolence forward to someone else. Paying it forward multiplies the impact and influence of kindness and love, enlarging its footprint in the world, rather than keeping it bottled up or limited to a contained group.

Love is a currency we need to help make more acceptable and in use today. We need to pay love forward to one another. Don't you agree? And I say this because love is the way in which we highlight and reveal the very presence of God and Jesus with us, and we need more God and Jesus in the world today. The great thing about unleashing God's force of love in the world, is that God's gifts of grace, mercy, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, hope, and light come with it. Yes, love is the currency we need most.

Love is... the currency... of what? **Of faithfulness** to God and God's will and God's way! We, as God's children, are called to be faithful to our loving God. To be faithful means to be

responsive, invested, loyal, committed, obedient, and honorable. How do we be faithful to God? Jesus breaks it down for us beautifully. We are faithful to God when we love.

Love isn't just something that happens. Love is an intentional gift of God put into the world to help make the world a more fulfilling and glorifying place for God's sake. God is the creator after all. What does love look like exactly? Faithful love looks like following the ultimate example of Jesus (in body and in teaching). We are to have the same mind as Christ, a mind of full love for God and full love for neighbor. The loving commands of the one who sent Jesus are the very things Jesus lived and taught. If we want to meet and experience the fullness of God, we must meet and experience the embodiment of Jesus. Doing so shows our loyalty and commitment to honor God in faithful action.

Jesus teaches about this emphasis of love right before sharing that he will now be going away to return to be by God's side in heaven. In his teaching, he reassures the disciples (and us), that they will not be left alone. An advocate, the Holy Spirit, will be with them as helper, companion, counselor, comforter. In specific terms, Jesus shares that the Holy Spirit will be a source and reminder to us of who Jesus is and what Jesus would do.

What we are to deduct from this transaction is that Jesus is passing to us the baton. Jesus is not dead. Quite the opposite actually. Jesus continues to live in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit and in us, as God's faithful disciples. In the absence of a physically present Christ, our daily practice of faithfulness to God makes real the living presence and love of God. Love in action is the route to experiencing Love's grace-filled indwelling. Love in action is the closest we come to evidence of God.

What is our call? Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called to love, for **love is the currency of faithfulness to God.**

To be faithful one must commit. And often, we find that our commitments require recommitting. In the church we do this during worship when we come together to affirm our faith. We also do it when we celebrate baptism and are asked to recall our own baptisms. We also do it when we receive communion, for by receiving the bread of life and cup of salvation Christ gives, is to refuel for our spiritual journeys.

Scouting has drawn affirmation to the importance of commitment by developing the Scout Oath, in which scouts recite as they come together. To declare "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and to my country and to obey the scout law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally

straight” is to recommit to the oath. The pledge of allegiance we recite in school is another example.

As important as it is for us to state our commitment and willingness to be faithful, our words are empty if our commitment is void of action. Faithfulness is only complete if the command given is fulfilled. Think about it. “I love you God, but I just don’t feel like showing it today.” “I am committed to doing my best to do my duty, but today I think I will only give 50%.” “I know I said I would help others at all times, but do I have to this time?” “On my honor I will keep myself morally straight, but I get to decide what is moral and what is not.” These statements leave more to be desired, especially by God.

Take all of Jesus’ teachings and I believe you can summarize them into two commandments: love God and love others. For some, this has come to be known as the “Jesus Creed.” And part of the Jesus Creed is a charge to us, as God’s children, believers of Christ as our Lord and Savior, to embody loving God and loving others faithfully. When we do, we actively serve as ambassadors of Christ and help usher in God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Our call to be faithful is highlighted that much more as Jesus returns to heaven to be with God. As Christ returns, we are commissioned and commanded to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world just as Christ exemplified while he was on earth.

Teresa of Avila once shared, “Christ has no body now on earth but yours; yours are the only hands with which he can do his work, yours are the only feet with which he can go about this world, yours are the only eyes through which his compassion can shine forth upon a troubled world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

You may be someone today who needs a little love. You may be someone today who can give a little love. Together God is present and at work. What an honor?! What a privilege?! God thinks enough of us, Christ thinks enough of us, that we are given the opportunity and responsibility to carry the baton of God’s love faithfully. **Love is the currency of faithfulness!**

Let us pray:

God of endless and boundless love, how great thou art. We pray today as grateful and humble servants of your will and your way, knowing that all you call us to is made possible through your grace and love and power. What an honor and what a privilege it is to be your hands and feet and eyes on this earth. We seek, God, to be faithfully honorable and responsive in both word and action, loyal and committed to doing our best to do our duty to you and to others. For all who feel strong and courageous today, we pray your Spirit will fill them up and use them to highlight and reveal your nature and character to all. We pray for your love to rise up and overflow every lip and edge necessary to flood this earth with all that is patient and kind, humble and meek, transformational and motivational.

For all who are feeling weak and discouraged today, we pray their hearts and minds will be open to the power of the Spirit seeking to melt them, mold them, and lift them up. Where there is love, there you make your home... with those who have fallen and gotten injured, with those in the hospital, with those receiving treatments, with those who are lost, with those feeling left behind, with those who have become victims of violence, abuse, or hardship.

Your will and your way, God, is a will and way of love. We pray for your love to be felt by all this morning. We pray you will send shockwaves of love through each of our bodies as a sign of your presence and power within us. In opportunities of love being paid forward, we pray for parties that need a little love and parties that can give a little love, and that the two will indeed meet and witness to your great power.

Love God and love others. It is just that easy God and yet at times it is just that hard. Like our commitments and recommitments, may you know of our true intent, and may we be open to your gift to help us be faithful in all we say and do... whether we are going to school, going to work, parenting, scouting, hiking, canoeing, mentoring, worshipping, playing... to you all honor and praise are yours.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, the ultimate example of faithful love, who taught his disciples of every time and place to pray together... **Our Father...**