

Rev. Joan Pell
Sierra Pines United Methodist Church
Sermon: 09/23/2018
Series: *Extravagant Generosity: The Heart of Giving*
Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:3-6, John 13:34-35



The Art of Love



<Deuteronomy 6:3-6>

³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶ Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

<John 13:34-35>

*³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you **love one another**. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*



Do you like Country and Western songs? Sometimes these are called "somebody-done-somebody-wrong songs." You might have heard the old joke that if you play a country song backwards you get back your truck, your dog, your job, and your wife or husband. Perhaps these lyrics are popular in our culture because they acknowledge our difficulties with relationships, but they also speak from the cynical or negative aspects of our culture.¹

Paul encouraged the church to think on things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and praiseworthy when he wrote to the Philippians (Philippians 4:8). But our cynical culture makes it hard to focus on these things, doesn't it? Sometimes, even the church struggles to shift focus from the cynical and negative. That's why we began a journey last week to consider matters of the heart.



Last week you listed the many things that you love about this church. Take some time later to read the display. This week you have already shared who it is that has made a difference in your life.

¹ Michael Reeves & Jennifer Tyler, "Sunday 2 Sermon" file in *Extravagant Generosity: Planning Kit: The Heart of Giving* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011).

<Share my testimony – the names and memories!>



In the passage, we heard today from Deuteronomy is *The Shema*. The Shema Prayer is a prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services. Many pictures of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem show Orthodox Jews rocking back and forth reciting the Shema.

“We are called to love God with **all of our being**. With all my heart, with all my mind, with all my strength, with all my work (or retirement), with all my (reading and writing) and computers, with all my Facebook (posts), with all my wallet, with all my home, with all my time.”² This is what it means to love the Lord, your God.

Note that the Shema starts with the phrase “Hear, O Israel.” The first words of The Shema are not individual. They’re not, “Listen up, *Joan*,” or “*Joan*, note this.” The first words are national, communal, corporate, group-oriented in nature: “Hear me, all ye people of God!” It’s not for me alone, but for me as a member of the corporate people of God.³

The Greatest Commandment helps shape our worldview. It brings us back around to the fact that we are not the center of the universe. It connects us with something larger, something that God is doing in the world. And it gives us the great honor of being a part of it! But it subtly has the effect of training us that we are not the center of it. ... It calls us to redemption and obedience together, as one people.⁴ It calls us to express our love for God by loving one another.

In the Christian faith, we have the story in the gospel of Matthew where a lawyer asked Jesus which commandment is the greatest and Jesus says, “*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 neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*” (Matthew 22:37-40). And in the gospel of John which we just heard read, Jesus says, *I give you a new commandment, that you **love one another**. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* (John 13:34).

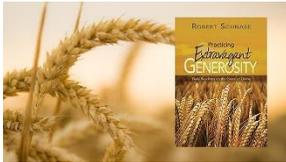
In the Shema and in Jesus’ teaching there is a clear expectation that the way we express our love for God is by loving one another. This focus on loving relationship is at the root of the scriptural values of our faith. This is a clear expectation of our faith. *But it is not always easy, is it?* Our relationships are matters of the heart. How do we express that love?

² Les Hardin, “Praying Like Jesus: The Shema” at the *Piedmont Lectures at Dallas Christian College* (Johnson University, Florida), <https://www.johnsonu.edu/JohnsonUniversity/media/System/PDFs/Piedmont-Lecture-1-Praying-the-Shema.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

I think **loving means giving**. I do not think we can love without giving. We express love by investing time in the lives of those we love. We share in their joy and special celebrations with gifts. We help them when they are in need perhaps financially or by our physical presence and our words or sometimes by companionable silence or a listening ear or a helping hand.



The blessings from those relationships that we develop are never just one-way. We become blessed when we give to another. In our devotional this week Bishop Schnase told the story of the fiddler player from the novel *Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier. The fiddler only knew 6 songs. His military unit was encamped one night when there is an explosion. A young girl is badly burnt and is near death. Her father sends for a fiddler to play her to heaven. He starts to play for her. He plays his drinking/bar tunes slowly, thinking that would make their tunes more suitable for the circumstances. And quickly exhausts his repertoire. He tells the girl he doesn't know any more songs. And she tells him to make one up. Soon the girl passes away and her dad thanks him for playing. The fiddler is transformed. From that day on, he never tired of studying and becoming a better player. His gift of music had become sacred. His talent became a source of joy and meaning. **Through our giving, God changes lives, and in changing them, transforms us.**⁵



We are part of a wonderful faith community here. We use our gifts and talents and interests to show our love to God and to each other and to our neighbor and to the world. Everything that we have here and all that we do, is because your **extravagant generosity** enables it to happen. Your time, your talents, your treasure, freely given, make this place and community what it is. And those gifts of love that you give then touch others and they come back around and touch you too. **All that we have is the fruit of someone's generosity.**



This week we celebrated people you love in our church. Consider an appropriate way to express your appreciation of these gifts of grace. You might want to tell those people face to face what they mean to you. There must be others whose names you did not write. Tell them too, how their loving words and actions have affected you. Find a way this week to say 'I love you' to your family members as well.

Next week, we will bring back our third heart cards as we explore what we would most like to see happen in our church in the coming year. *What is your greatest hope and best vision for God work through this congregation?*

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. We will love the Lord our God with all of our hearts, and with all of our souls, and with all of our minds and with all of our

⁵ Robert Schnase, *Practicing Extravagant Generosity: Daily Readings on the Grace of Giving* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 31-33.

strength. And we will love our neighbors as ourselves. And we will do this in the name of Christ Jesus.

Thanks be to God,
Amen.

Let us pray...

<Meditate on Video>⁶

Lord, you are undivided. You are One. As the persons of the Trinity freely share of themselves with one another, you call us to do likewise. You have commanded us to love one another, so that the whole world may see who you truly are and a glimpse of your kingdom here on earth. Show us how we can improve our generosity more and more, so that eventually it becomes as easy and natural as breathing. We place all our trust in the love you showed to us in your son, Jesus Christ, and it is in his name we pray. Amen.

Resources

Reeves, Michael & Jennifer Tyler. *Extravagant Generosity: Planning Kit: The Heart of Giving*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011.

⁶ Michael Reeves & Jennifer Tyler, *Extravagant Generosity: Small Group and Worship DVD: The Heart of Giving* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), *Worship: The Art of Love*.