

Love One Another

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John 13:31-35

Greek scholars identify four Greek words for the English word “love.” Two appear in the New Testament; two don’t. There is *storge*, the love of a family, father, mother, sister, brother. There is *eros*, or romantic or sensual love. Each concept is present in the New Testament, but the words themselves aren’t.

In the New Testament, there is *philia*, brotherly or sisterly affection. Romans 12:10 encourages us to “love one another with mutual affection.” Then there is *agape*, which appears most prominently and frequently in the New Testament. And understandably so. *Agape* love is self-giving love, sacrificial love, the kind of love Jesus demonstrated to his followers and demonstrates to us, and, therefore, the kind of love we are called to demonstrate to one another, and to the world.

I have been listening to quite a lot of Prince music in the last few days, and watching many Prince videos on YouTube and other places. Prince, the musicologists say, owned the 1980’s, and the 1980’s were my musical wheelhouse. That was a time when all kinds of music was played on the radio, so even though I never owned a Prince album – they were albums in those days – I have about 10 or 15 Prince songs in my deep musical memory banks. “When Doves Cry” is, I believe, my favorite.

I don’t know if this is a theory that can be proven, but it seems as if every pop song is a love song. Either love fulfilled or love rebuffed. Either love sought after or love experienced. Every so often a political theme gets tossed in, but you get my point. Even country songs about trucks and dogs are love songs, just with different subjects.

I don’t know if it’s entirely accurate to say that every Prince song was a love song, but the proportions are pretty high. And to put our newly-found Greek skills to use, nearly every Prince song was a song about *eros*, romantic or sensual love. So

not much Prince quoting will go on today, at least from the pulpit. Though here's one that is pretty good: "If I gave you diamonds and pearls/Would you be a happy boy or a girl/If I could I would give you the world/All I can do is just offer you my love."

So I remain a Prince fan, though I was never a Prince aficionado. What I have learned this week is that as much as his personal life was about *eros*, and his music as well, that he was generous with his money, giving away millions anonymously to deserving charities, music, education, human services. That he was a good friend, if not an unusual one. That he cared for his community, and when he could have located to Los Angeles or elsewhere his base of operations remained the Twin Cities.

Whether that is *agape* love or not is not necessarily the point. The point is love. In all its forms.

Those of us who have been making the case over these years for full LGBTQ equality in the church, and now marriage equality, have said that it's been about the content and quality of love, and not the subject. Relationships are not guaranteed to succeed, or, conversely, destined to fail, simply by being between differently gendered or same gendered persons. That seems to make sense to me.

And it also seems to be faithful to think about all the kinds of love in the world, in human relationships, as gracious gifts of God. If God is the giver of every good thing, and we believe God is, then God is the giver of every good from of love. Romantic. Familial. Sisterly or brotherly. And self-giving. All good gifts from God, all to be nurtured and cherished and stewarded.

The lectionary loops us back to the events of Holy Week. Jesus has shared his last supper with his friends, and identified that Judas will betray him. That moment was portrayed so powerfully last week by our children in their musical, which was simply terrific. Jesus is speaking with the remaining disciples. I will not be with you much longer, he says, and where I am going you can't come. And then he pivots from whatever they are feeling about what he is saying. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Another piece of music etched even deeper into my psyche than any Prince song is a hymn I learned as a kid. It's in the new hymnal though we won't sing it today – "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love." It is an extraordinary theological affirmation that Jesus makes. And it's an extraordinary theological affirmation for us to make. We have loved him, and rightly so. But now he is going away. And rather than loving the memory of him, or where we imagine him to be, we are to love one another. The world, its people, become more than a surrogate for Jesus, but become Jesus himself, as we are called to love one another. They will know we are Christians by our love.

This is a commandment. A mandate. As much as Jesus tells us anything he tells us to love one another. Not suggests. But commands.

If you take away anything from Jesus, this is what it should be – because he loved us, we are to love one another. This is *agape* love, but such self-giving happens across the love spectrum, does it not. In the ways that we live with our partners, our spouses, our children and grandchildren. In the ways that we live with our friends and co-workers. In the ways that we approach the world, which is so love-starved that we lash out in such un-loving ways as a response to what is so painfully missing.

Love one another. What does that look like? There are a million examples, or a million and one. Here are three, illustrative but not definitive.

We are working on public education a great deal these days through the movement called Great Schools for All. There may be many ways to transform education, but the bottom line is that it *must* be transformed because thousands of children living in the city are being sacrificed to crushing poverty and political incapacity. So Great School for All has a proposal – we will talk about it on an upcoming Sunday morning, and you can read about it. But here's the point: I was speaking to an employee of the Rochester City Schools about this, and he, knowing what I do in my day job, simply said, "This is about love, isn't it?" This is about love. How we love one another by loving the children of our city.

Yesterday a new Habitat for Humanity home was dedicated at 70 Ries Street, just off of Jay Street. Though the sign says Third Presbyterian Church, this home was the gift of Otto and Sheila Muller-Girard. Otto is a 20 year veteran of Habitat work. In fact, most of the cabinetry in most of the Rochester Habitat houses has

been built by Otto, and this new house is no exception. The dedication service was joyful and lovely as the new homeowner Roberta received this gift with grace and hope. Otto made a little speech, and in it he quoted the prophet Jeremiah... "seek the welfare of the city." How we love one another by loving the city, and providing homes for our neighbors.

This morning a wonderful group of young people joins Third Church. They have been nurtured by their families and they have been nurtured by this congregation. We have loved them, as best we could, teachers and advisors and educators partnering with parents and families. We will not stop loving them now, of course, but this day marks a transition point, where, as they receive the love of this congregation, they will be called equally to share that love. Perhaps it will be in volunteering in this place. Perhaps in other places. Perhaps it will extend to new family configurations, new ways of connecting. But what we can only hope for, and pray for, is that the seeds of love we have planted in them, or, rather, that God has planted in them through the ministry of this congregation, will continue to blossom and grow.

I don't know what this will look like for you. I just know it is what we are told to do. It will make a difference. I know that as well. To those you love. And to your own heart, whose capacity to love is limited only by need, which seems to be endless.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. Amen.