

Gracious God, Open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom. Open our hearts and minds that we may know the cries of those who are hungry and hurting and dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Tina Turner, the queen of Rock, had one of her greatest hits in 1984 with a song entitled What's Love Got to do With It? Well, according to what Jesus is telling us in our scripture lesson this morning, it sounds like love is at the center of it all.

So, we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength. And we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Hmm...I can see the first part – I think that I can do that, but that part about loving your neighbor...that's tough. You see, I don't even like my neighbor.

Now, I'm not talking about the neighbor on this side of our house, Bob and Cynthia are great. They're a retired couple with grandkids Monica's age that come to visit regularly when they were in school. And the three kids, Monica, Gunter and Corrine grew to be pretty tight during those visits over the years. We've become good friends with the Thomases. We go out together occasionally, grill out together every now and then and even have a lot of the same interests. We've bonded together quite well – so no problem with them. I don't see a problem with loving them...that's easy.

But the guy on the other side of our property...well, that's a different story. To start with, he has kept as many as 4 huge, mean dogs in his back

yard. They tend to bark a lot, especially on those nights that I'm having trouble sleeping. They get out of the fence every so often and terrorize the neighborhood and they scared Monica when she was a young child (and they don't really do a lot for me either). Now this guy just doesn't seem to think that there's a problem when we complain to him. Oh, and there's his daughter – the one in college...at least that's where she's supposed to be – well, his daughter and her friends stay out late on the front stoop of their house – radio's blasting – loud cars and who knows what else – just being a nuisance. The police are over there frequently. Now, I don't think that Jesus meant that I'm really supposed to love people like this...do you?

That brings up a whole list of people who are hard to love. Mind if I share a bit of my list with you?

What about the folks who find joy in just bugging the daylight's out of everyone else...

You know the ones:

The folks who drag 2 carts of groceries into the 12 items or less line

Or the cashiers at those "fast food" places who are as slow as Christmas at taking your order and then they still get it messed up.

And while, I'm thinking about folks who bug me...

What about folks who are just plain mean...you know the ones I'm talking about – the folks who are just downright unpleasant and seem to enjoy doing the things that make your life miserable – I just can't stand them. They're just about as bad as the folks who won't shut up. I just don't like folks won't give me a chance to speak. They just go on and on, blah, blah, blah, blah as if they're the only ones with anything worth saying.

And what about those folks who have to talk loud on their cell phones in public...those folks just drive me crazy. Or what about the folks who have those Bluetooth headsets for their phones and stand around talking...sometimes you think they're talking to you, but they don't even know you're in the vicinity. You know, when we were younger, if we saw someone just walking down the street talking and gesticulating away, we'd get on the other side of the street because we thought they were nuts...

And how about the folks who won't wear masks or who won't practice social distancing in this pandemic? Charlene and I were at the grocery store yesterday. We were wearing our masks as we stood at the fish counter getting some salmon that I hope to grill this afternoon. While we are talking with the employee behind the counter, this guy with no mask barges in right between us and interrupts our conversation... the clerk had to say to the guy, "I'm sorry sir, but I'm waiting on these folks who were here first." Talk about rude. Do they even care about anyone other than themselves?

Even worse than the rude folks, you know who I really can't stand? Closed-minded people. You know the ones I mean. The ones who are so judgmental - as if they've never made a mistake in their own lives.

That brings me to those religious leaders who are so ready to condemn everyone who doesn't toe their narrow line of how we are to behave...and then they participate in the very behavior that they condemn...disgusting isn't it?

I can trust you with all of this, right? Because people who can't keep a secret...well, I don't like them either. Gossipers are the worst aren't they? Oh by the way, did you hear about...I'll tell you later.

I've forgotten what I was talking about...let's see...Luke 10:25-37, right?

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Wow, how much more do we have to complicate things?

Jesus doesn't say that we're to only love the neighbors that we like.
Or just the people that we go to church with.
Or just the people that vote like we do, or look like we do, or live
where we do or love like we do.
Jesus didn't say that we should only love the folks who worship as we
do
Or interpret scriptures as we do
Or attend the same worship service that we do
Or who like the same worship music that we do.

In fact, Jesus doesn't even indicate in these passages that we should
only love the people who know Jesus Christ
Or even just the people who WANT to know Christ
Or his Dad, for that matter.

You know what? I'm not called to even like my neighbor, let alone
approve of his or her laundry list of what I might consider to be sins. But
regardless of who they are, where they are or what has happened to them, it
seems that I *am* called...we *all are called* by God to heal wounds, provide
food and lodging and comfort to those who are hurting and to show mercy to
those who stumble or who have been knocked down by life.

I don't have to like it. But I am called by God to do it.

It's love that led the Good Samaritan to help his neighbor.

It's love that over the years led Mrs E. E. Wiley, a widow, to take in her first orphan in 1895, an event that established the Holston Home for Children in Greenville, Tennessee so that orphans might have a chance at life and know what love is. We take up a special offering on every 5th Sunday to help make this special Holston Conference ministry continue.

It's love that led others to establish Emory and Henry, and Tennessee Wesleyan Colleges to enable promising young folks to get the education that they need to get ahead in life.

It's love that causes Doctors and nurses to become involved with organizations like Doctors Without Borders to step right into health crises like the Ebola epidemic in Africa or the unknowns of treating COVID-19 patients, risking their own lives for the sake of others.

You see, unlike Tina Turner's hit song back in 1984, Love is the basis for it all. Because God loves us, we can love others... and because God loves us, we have no excuse NOT to love as God loves.

That is the love that Jesus models. That is the love that Jesus teaches. And that all-encompassing, all-consuming love that will not let us go is a love that we cannot handle on our own. We need God's help. And God is ready to give us that help if we only turn to God.

What's love got to do with it?

Everything!

Thanks be to God in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.