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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.

Jesus continues to be confronted by the religious leaders of his day trying to discredit him in the eyes of his followers while the different groups work to make a name for themselves. Just prior to our reading for today the Sadducees failed in their attempt to trap Jesus, and now the Pharisees try to do the same. Here a lawyer asks, 'which is the greatest commandment?'

Jesus responds with the proper words from Deuteronomy. This verse is one every Jewish school boy would have been able to answer. 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with al your mind.' After all for those standing around would have said that loving God was their central focus. They did so by religiously following every law of Moses to the letter.

But Jesus was not done he quickly quotes Moses from Leviticus saying, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Then connects them to say that you need both of these to fulfill the law and commandments. To focus only on one or the other leaves you lacking. To love God and not the neighbor might make you feel righteous and holy in the sight of other people. But it soon becomes about you and your feeling that you are somehow earning your way into heaven as you step over and on your neighbor around you.

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Likewise working to show your love for neighbor can also come at a price as you soon make a name for yourself in the world. But what does it gain you if you gain the whole world and lose your life in the process. Jesus is saying a person shall both, love the Lord their God with everything they have and love their neighbor as themselves.

One thing that gets in our way is what does Jesus mean by love? What do we mean by love? After all most of us say that word all of the time. We say I love you; I love my dog; I love pizza; I love school; I love my parents; I love my children; I love my car; I love my country; I love my church; I love the Chicago Bears; I love, I love, I love, I love...

Mostly when we speak of love it is for us a feeling a passive emotion or attachment to another person or object or thing. Sometimes it is a passionate feeling or desire for another. But almost always in the New Testament the word used is *agape*, which is neither passive or an emotion, it is active mercy.

One of the places I often speak of love is at weddings. The love that brings people there most of the time is that feeling and desire for the other, for family and friends. At many weddings you will hear the chapter from 1Corinthians.

¹ If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not

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have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends ¹³ And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

So often when I preach on these verses in a wedding I talk about what they say to the wedding couple as they begin their new life together and what it teaches us about how to live in the love they share for each other. Yet these verses were not written by Paul to talk about the love two people share or to used at weddings. Paul was giving instructions to the church how to come together and live together as the body of Christ. How they are to take seriously the words of Jesus to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbor as our self.

Living in love is being patient with those who try our patience, to show loving kindness to those we dislike, to celebrate the good fortune of others, to rejoice not that someone fails but in the truth which holds us all together. Living in love allows us to bear all things, believe all things, hope in all things and endure all things because it is love that will never end.

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The love Paul writes about, the love Jesus speaks about is not an interior emotion, affection or attraction. It is an action, a behavior a commitment to seek the good of another no matter what. To love God then is to love God's children and seek the best for them.

One other place shows us what it means to live out of love for the other. After Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees in our lesson today, they left asking him no further questions. But that was not the end of them. Soon they joined with the Sadducees and other religious leaders to conspire against this rebel rouser, this trouble maker named Jesus.

Knowing his time among them was about to come to a bitter end. Jesus gathered with his disciples for the last time to eat the Passover meal. Following the meal Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them saying, 'take and eat this is my body given for you. Then he took a cup blessed it and gave it to them saying, drink of it all of you for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.' Then they left and went to the Mount of Olives.

This is how much God loves us, enough to demand that we care for one another, enough to forgive and renew us each time we fail, enough to give us back to each other to try again and again to live out of love, enough to give us the body, blood and resurrected life of our Lord Jesus, all in the name of love. AMEN