

Reflection

February 23 2025

Psalm 37: 1-11, 39-40

Luke 6: 27-38

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Title: All you Need is Love

Prayer: Loving God, bless us as we open our hearts to be challenged by your call for us this day. Amen.

All you need is love / All you need is love / All you need is love, love / Love is all you need.

That's what the Beatles said, anyway. Is it true?

Is love really ALL we need?

What about fairness, karma, a proper judicial system. Don't we need those?

Apparently, all we need is love.

This is certainly one way we can read the scriptures for today. The writer of the psalm and Jesus both tell us in their own way that all we need is love.

What do they mean by love?

On the surface we can read these passages and think that the kind of love they mean is push over love. Like, "oh, if I just keep being loving – aka exhausting myself or getting walked over or letting everyone else get what they want, then I will have loved properly."

As usual, a surface read doesn't help us much. That kind of love sounds draining.

So, what do these passages mean by LOVE?

United Church minister, David Ewart offers a concise description of the six words used for Love in the bible. In the Hebrew Bible we have Ahab and Hased. Ahab can be

used in many ways – physical attraction, partner love, parental love, the love of certain places or things, God’s love for humans and human’s love for God.

Hesed is a non-conditional kind of love. It is covenantal. It is ongoing. But it is not neutral. It has a purpose. Hesed puts us in a concrete relationship with God, we are bonded. There is a purpose to this covenantal kind of love – we are to be a blessing; we are to be in right relationship with everyone – friend, foe, animals, the oceans, trees. This Love is loyal, unbreakable and moves toward blessing for all, no matter how long it may take.

In the New Testament there are four words we translate into love: agape, phileo, charitas and eros.

The Greek word used for love in this Luke passage is agape. And agape is very close to the Hebrew word Hesed. Agape love is God’s unbreakable relationship with creation – unconditional love and kindness. A relationship in which all creation might live together in justice, harmony and well being.

So ... this is what we’re talking about when we say “all you need is love.” This big, all encompassing, never ending, justice seeking, mercy offering, unconditional love that is a blessing for all time. The love God offers to us. The love we are called to offer to each other and the world.

All you need is love, love, love is all you need.

True?

Will the world really be at peace if we all loved this way? Is it possible for all of us all the time to love like this? Is it a percentage thing – like if 68.4% of all creation loved this way, most of the time, could it shift the other 31.6%? Or is it 100% of creation all-in or nothing?

To live out this kind of love maybe it’s better if we focus more intentionally on our own actions and whole-hearted behaviour; and trust that God is the One who rules and knows what’s going on our role in this Hesed/Agape/ covenantal/ relational love is to enact change in the way we live out this kind of love.

Which leads us to the part of the Luke passage that stands out for most of us.

I used to get all riled up by the “turn the other cheek” verse. I couldn’t believe that Jesus was telling us to get slapped on the other cheek as well. No way were we supposed to just lay down and get walked over. But there it was, in the bible... “If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.” (29-30)

Come on.

But, like most scripture, there’s more under the surface.

A master – in Jesus’ time – would expect to slap a servant, or employee, if they misbehaved or didn’t finish a job. But, there was a certain way to do it – there were rules for everyone, and following these rules upheld one’s honour. You could only slap with the back of your right hand and only the right cheek of the other.

When Jesus instructs us to turn the other cheek, we are being invited into an act of non-violent resistance. To offer the left cheek would make it impossible for the other person to slap us correctly. They could choose to use the palm of their left hand, slap our left cheek or walk away. All options available to them would diminish their power/honour and level the playing field between us. So, when we are instructed to turn the other cheek we are not being invited to take a second helping – to permit abusive behaviour – we are being invited to illustrate for the other person the injustice of the situation.

Same with giving our shirt when someone asks for our coat. The ‘someone’ isn’t anyone. It is someone with more power than us. So, they ask for our coat, which is a power move; and then we give our shirt also – and we stand there with nothing on. That’s not us getting walked over; that’s us offering a pretty immediate way to show the injustice of the situation.

The point of these passages is not about letting the bully win; they are about the power we each have to help create a different world – a world that operates from that Hessed / Agape / covenantal / relational kind of love.

Of course we don’t know, but the more I reflected on this passage this week the more I realized there’s nothing that says these things did happen – no where does it say the disciples went out and got slapped on both cheeks all the time; or that they had all their clothes taken from them.

Somehow that helps me look at these examples of Jesus more as teachable moments. Ways to show us what is possible; that there is another way, another world we could live in.

“Love your enemies” is not about getting walked over, it’s about desiring good for the other person.

Right after Jesus says “love your enemies” he says “do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you.”

It doesn’t say agree with them, accept what they do, or even like them. It doesn’t say we can’t confront them or protest against what they do. It doesn’t say we can’t express our frustration and anger.

It says ‘do good to them,’ ‘bless them,’ ‘and pray for them.’ So ... act in a loving way; in a way that may develop or restore relationship, a way that may create mercy and harmony, a way that may bring whole heartedness.

We don’t have to feel love for our enemies to act in loving ways.

All of this sounds good on paper, doesn’t it? But acting it out? That’s hard. Because other people might not get this message, so what? We’re supposed to keep doing all this loving work while “they” just keep taking? That’s not fair.

But, the message here is that this kind of loving actually changes things. Truly wanting the well being for the other has the power to grow more love, so the theory goes.

We can think of a whole bunch of enemies on a global scale that we don’t want to love or put any effort into. Now think on a micro scale – someone on the strata board who grates on you; the person who cut in front of you on the highway; the family member who keeps criticizing you; the person at work who keeps stealing your ideas.

We are being called to do good, bless and pray for them. We are being called into agape love with them. We are being asked to “turn the other cheek” – meaning to show how the relationship is not whole or is somehow unjust and that we are going to stay present to help grow the connection into a covenantal, right relationship.

All you need is love, love, love is all you need.

That may be true, but it sure isn't easy.

This world that God desires is hard to get at sometimes.

And I think it's hard because we get wrapped up in our own heads.

We think that we have to solve it all. We think that it's up to us.

Because we're human we often forget that we are human. We forget that we believe in a God that is indescribable, that can create beautifully delicate butterfly wings that can fly thousands of miles, a God that is unbelievably devoted, that is actually greater than us – any and all of us for all time.

We forget. We forget that it's okay to be led by this eternal Love; it's okay to humble ourselves and give our glory to this Holy Creator – this Holy Creator that only wants the MOST for us – that wants us to be in loving relationship with all creation, to be a blessing and to be blessed.

All we need is love?

We already have it!

We just have to share it.

Amen.