

*CRIBB<S>NOTE – October 26, 2008*

We hear the word “love” so often it seems to have lost meaning. Yet, it is the core of our understanding of God. The other day my daughter asked, “How do we know God exists?” It was a wonderful question that led to a very incomplete answer. But, it opened a conversation that allowed us to explore examples of God’s love. That is it. We know God exists because of the reality of love. “God is love” is more than a bumper sticker slogan.

Everything comes into existence out of an expression of infinite love. It is God’s love for life that makes it possible for Creation to evolve into this very moment. Jesus taught a clear, consistent message of love. His life was a witness of love and he demonstrated how to be love to everyone, including the unlovable. Jesus had associates who were prostitutes, tax collectors, traitors, and sinners. He even loved his enemies. Jesus loves us.

Love is not just an emotional state limited to how we feel about others. It is a commitment that drives us to radical ways of living. That is a point of departure from the popular notions of love that result in romantic songs, poetry, and shallow relationships.

Love that means commitment is a source of courage and never-before-imagined behavior that crosses boundaries. Love as commitment means increasing our giving and offering ourselves for causes that expand our lives.

As we near Stewardship Sunday, we are offered an opportunity to think deeply about ways we can give more money, time, and creative energy to support our church. When we think of love as commitment we imagine our relationships as the center of our life. This helps us read the story of Jesus’ confrontation with religious leaders as a lesson in genuine love.

As a devoted Jew, Jesus referred to the Torah as he responded to a question about which of the Commandments and Laws was the greatest. Instead of falling into a trap set by those who felt threatened by his popularity, Jesus answered their questions with a surprising, inclusive statement.

Quoting from the book of Leviticus, Jesus said, “Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind... And love your neighbor as yourself.” He avoided prioritizing the laws that would suggest one meant others could be ignored. Instead, he placed all the laws under the rubric of focusing our entire life toward God and reaching out to other people who surround us. By loving God and neighbors we encompass all the laws.

As we consider the wisdom of Jesus, we can imagine how we can become so committed to God that every part of our self is dedicated to exhibiting our love by living a compassionate life.