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AMDG

Proper 25A, October 26, 2017

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*

In these simple words Jesus summarized all of his teaching and the very core of the God life. We are called to be fully united with the Creator in love, and fully united with one another in love. We are called into a Divine Dance in the intimate sharing back and forth in love of God's Creative Blessing.

It sounds straightforward, and the concept is simple, and the words are simple. But of course living out this mission is not easy. We are beset on all sides by forces that would make us forget who we really are and distract us from God's call. And that is the story of our fallenness, our brokenness. While we are made in God's image and are called to be reconciled with the Creator and with each other, the forces of evil subtly and relentlessly try to convince us that we are weak, alone, and separate from everyone and everything. That to survive, we must beat others to the punch, and that whatever we want we must go out and get. The forces of evil tell us there isn't enough, and we'd better hold onto what we have before someone else tries to get it. That we shouldn't let others get the best of us. These forces try to convince that we are weak and any power we need - physical, material, emotional - we must get on our own, by guile or by force. The forces of evil try to convince us that the physical world is all there is to life, rather than being a manifestation of God's abundance and a foretaste of the heavenly kingdom. When we listen to these evil forces, the call to love God with all our minds, hearts, and souls seems like a call to the vague worship of some far-off deity, and the command to love our neighbors as ourselves, seems an idealistic cliché.

But we know better. Deep in our hearts we sense there is something greater in life than winning and losing. Jesus continues to remind us through word and sacrament. While we might be beset on all sides by the insidious counsels of self-aggrandizement self-gratification, what they cannot provide is the deep satisfaction that comes from living a life in God. We might pursue our own designs and desires, searching for fleeting fulfillment, but experience tells us that true satisfaction comes in knowing God. And as we continue to struggle to achieve and to escape our frailty, we ultimately fail. It is when we accept our powerlessness that we realize our true power.

When we accept the love of God, when we love God fully with mind, heart, and soul; it is then that God is not some far-off deity, but a reality that we can feel and touch.

Loving God totally is best accomplished when we live into who we are as children of God - fully embracing our gifts, and talents, as well as unhesitatingly taking up the crosses that present themselves in life.

When we love with all mind, heart, and soul we are unabashedly ourselves, unafraid to take risks because we know we live and move and have our being in the Creator of the world in which we delight and who delight in us. It is through the passionate embrace of our true natures that we love and glorify the Creator. This love of God through becoming fully oneself may sound like the happy hooey of self-help gurus. But it is as far from that as can be. It's a subtle distinction- struggling to be all I can be to assert myself, or letting myself be fully what God intended for God's glory. But the self-fulfillment struggle is never ending and inevitably leads to conflict with others because it is done under the illusion of separation. However, the desire to live Fully into what God calls me to be becomes easier because as I live more authentically - accepting all the messiness that comes with that -I become more and more aware of my unity with the Creator, and inevitably become more aware of my unity with all of creation including my neighbors. This is the concept of divinization that the early church fathers spoke of - Clement of Alexandria said, "For if one knows himself, he will know God; and knowing God, he will be made like God." Or St. Irenaeus' proclamation - "The Glory of God is a human being fully alive."

And the loving of neighbor as self? Well, I've often thought that one has to consider loving oneself as a sort of prerequisite to loving neighbor as self. However, as I reflect on these two intertwined commandments, I wonder if it's not more cyclical than hierarchical. Perhaps, as we love God fully, by being fully the gifted and talented people God calls us to be, if we are then freer to love others fully. For, if I'm busy trying to figure out who I am, or become who I think I should be, I'll never have time to love anyone else. But, if I accept God's transformative love, and live fearlessly as the person God calls me to be, I am united with God, and then free of the struggle to assert myself. Thus, I am open to love you and see you as a beloved child of God. And, perhaps as I seek God in all persons, I find my own belovedness mirrored back to me, and others see the face of Christ mirrored back to them. I think we see examples of this all around us, in those who give selflessly and generously, who seem tireless in their expressions of love for others. We see reflected in them their passionate love for God. This is what we saw in our beloved Deacon Jim. People like Jim live fully into who God has called them to be, boldly and without fear. They're the people we want to be with and want to be like.

Loving God by being fully myself. Loving neighbor as myself because I feel united to others through God- maybe that's a lot to get one's mind around, especially when the call to self gratification can be so loud and ever present. But Jesus gave us an everlasting memorial of our redemption in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist we are given a foretaste, a physical reminder of this divine reality of Unity in the Creator. It is why I often use this bidding to communion - "The body of Christ for the body of Christ. Be what you see. Receive what you are." These are not my words, of course. They come from a sermon of St. Augustine which he would give to the newly baptized before they received communion for the first time. Up until that Easter Vigil service, they would have been sequestered, disconnected from the rest of the congregation. And it was after their baptism, that the full reality of their union with God and their union with the faithful was made fully manifest for them.

So, I would like to use the call to communion, as well. That we might be explicitly reminded of what we are about to partake - physical expression of our oneness with God and with one another, and our call

to live that life authentically and generously, through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.