

## Love One Another

What was your first pet? Was it a dog? A cat? Something else. What was the name of this animal? If you would, please turn to the person next to you, or if there is no one around, please get up (if you're able) to share. You have two minutes. Is there anyone who'd like to share with the congregation this morning?

It is easy for us to love a pet, isn't it? Pets, for the most part, offer us this unconditional love. Sure, they can get mad at us, and maybe ignore us for a bit, but they almost always come around, unless they've been abused. Even then, they simply want to be loved back.

We know that love comes in all shapes, sizes, and forms. Some people have professed their love for pizza, certain flavors of ice cream, holidays, etc. It all seems so easy! But what about when it comes to people?

In the time of Jesus, love was not an unfamiliar concept but was widely accepted in the practice of Judaism and the Greco-Roman world. However, there was a catch. Those of the Jewish faith would "love" those who practiced their faith and would never love any Gentile. Because of this, people from the Greco-Roman world would never think to become attracted to one of the Hebrew people. Now, to think that we thought things were a little less complicated back then!

In 2025, we find that we are still affected by some prejudices when it comes to love. We're better at it than we used to be, but prejudices remain nonetheless.

Look at the wars in the Middle East. The commandment to “love one another” that is so prevalent in the Judaism and Muslim is not being followed. The battles being fought in the Ukraine and Russia, India and Pakistan do not resemble the commandment to “love one another.”

Loving those with whom we agree or are partial to is the easy part. Loving the rest of the folks we come in contact with is a much harder proposition. But this will not be news to those sitting in the pews of your church or next to you in Bible Study. It is a part of the human condition to love and to want to be loved. Reality is ... it’s easier to love those who are more loving and lovable. It is said that John, in his old age, would remind those around him to love one another. When questioned why he told them this so very often, his reply would be, “Because it is what our Lord commanded. If it is all you do, then it is enough.”

Jesus told his disciples that they would be recognized by the way they loved one another. The early followers of the Risen Christ certainly strived to emulate this. They were even chastised by non-believers as they said, “Look at the little Christians—see how they love one another.” They took that taunt and made it their battle cry.

We are called to continue in this love today. We are called to love one another without qualification. As followers of the Risen Christ, almost two thousand years after the first followers of “the Way” showed us how, we are called

to be recognized by our love for one another. We love and welcome people regardless of faith or denomination, age, who they love, who they voted for, economic status, how they dress, how they identify, what committees they sign up for or don't, and even if their attendance is sporadic or not at all. We are called to love our neighbors, particularly our neighbors who look to us for help and hospitality with the thrift shop, lunch, or Food Truck.

This act, to love others, is a distinguishing mark of the followers of Christ then and will continue to be (verses 34-35). Some would say that one of the weaknesses of the church today is the way many Christians do not embody this commandment — or the others — commanding his followers to love their neighbor.

My siblings in Christ, Jesus was bold and very clear about the commandment to “Love one another.” It is still easier to love our pets. However, may this commandment be enough to spur us on so that others will see us and say, “Wow! See how they love one another.”