

Lent- Love

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A Short Devotional for the Lenten Season

Days 36-40

Lent 2021

Love

Lent 2021- Day 36

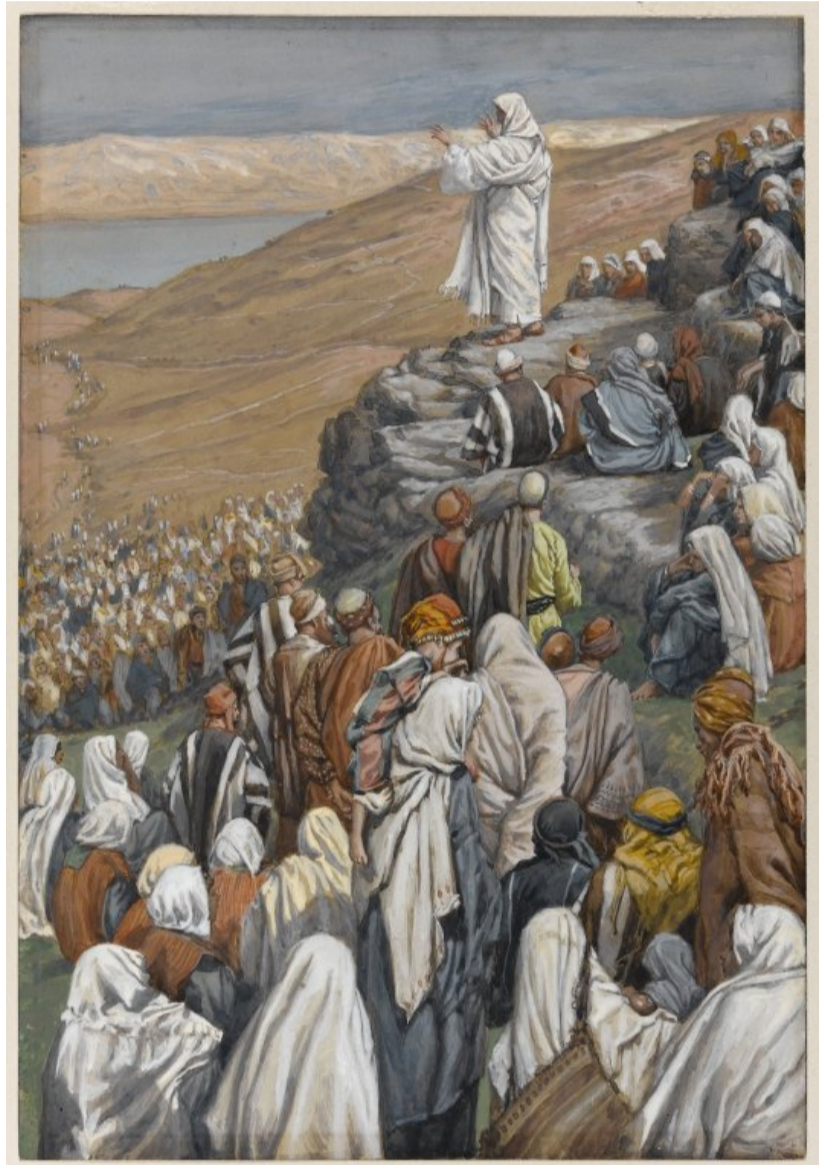
46For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? Matthew 5:46 (ESV)

What if Jesus was on social media and generated buzz with his Twitter or TikTok account? Would you respect Him any more or less? If he loved as the world, he would probably do things for hits and clicks. Feed a crowd? Make sure we get a good shot. Heal the sick? Capture the interview in about 120 seconds.

Thank God that Jesus does not love as the world loves. In his sermon on the mount in Matthew 5, Jesus recasts God's love for his followers. He tells them, "you have heard it said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy...but I tell you love your enemies."

He lives up to this further in His crucifixion as he blesses his torturers, asking God to forgive them. He loves those crucified alongside him. If he simply loved those who loved him, what would make him any different.

Indeed, he loved to the end just as he instructed his disciples. How do we live out this ethic? As we hear Jesus' preaching, recall those moments where he could have exacted revenge and walk with him. Consider the scope of wrongs done to you and those around you. What is your first instinct? What is your primal reaction? Jesus' call for non-retaliation is one of the most difficult instructions for those who are to be salt and light. Today, ask for his help and walk in the journey of love as Christ embraced a cross and endured for love's sake.



Love

Lent - Day 37

9As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. John 15:9 (ESV)

In seminary, students learn Christian theology, and one of the greatest mysteries surrounds the Christian trinity. God is three, and God is one. This mathematical and logical conundrum astounds and confuses. Some choose to throw it away as logical garbage.



Islam disregards the trinity as one of their primary tenets and prayers.

In his last days, Jesus tells the disciples about God's trinitarian love. "As the father has loved me, so I have loved you." The Father has loved the Son, and the Son loves the disciples. And the disciples, empowered in His Spirit, will love each other, affecting future believers.

The glue of the Christian trinity flows from the bottle of God's love. He loves, and we abide in it. Jesus expected his disciples to continue in it, to abide as a branch in a vine. Without this love, the vine will shrivel and lose life. It will not produce fruit and will wither. Maybe even worse, it might produce weeds and choke out God's love.

As look toward holy week, remember God's love that marked the journey towards Golgotha. This

is not primarily a story about torture, murder, and conspiracy. This is not a soap opera simply highlighting human treachery and frailty. It is about love.

When you see acts of sacrifice, cherish the seed of God's love that permeates selflessness. A parent's love of a newborn. The giving of one's life for another. The refugee finding a home. The dedicated civil servant advocating for the powerless. Evangelism that touches both the heart and the hand. The support of the prisoner who longs to change their way. This week, cherish God's love and abide in it. It started with God.

Love

Lent Day 38

6but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. Exodus 20:6 (ESV)

Though I do not own pets, my children long for a dog for our home. Their cousin has a dog. My extended family owns dogs, and I cannot bring myself to bring one home. From the maintenance to the ongoing care, the tasks appear overwhelming. Though I can also see the selling points. From what I can see, dogs are loyal. They do not care about their owners' appearances, they cherish the family regardless of how they might treat one another, and they react the same regardless of surrounding troubles such as a worldwide pandemic or loss of job. I think dog owners experience this and know a shade of God's love that I might miss.

As Israel enters a new land and a new place, God extends himself laying out his loyalty to his people. In Israel's cherished covenant in Exodus 20, God introduces his character, demanding loyalty, but also granting his own. In fact, the groundwork for this nation will not be a constitution, philosophy, or governing structure. They won't have the hanging gardens of Babylon or the vast kingdoms of Persia. They can't point to erected pyramids for their kings or lavish palaces and temples that stand the test of time. They simply have a covenant oath of loyalty from an invisible God who granted his own loyalty and steadfast love.



This story bound Israel and their God, creating a people based on steadfast love and loyalty. This loyalty oath of love would be their calling card in a world that saw other gods and kingdoms formed on the basis of war, weapons, and technology.

The Bible's God speaks into this world, reminding that it is not by power nor by might. He does not coerce people and make generations that fear him out of guilt or shame. His descendants do not tell mythological tales of fright or superstition. He does not require blind religious devotion dedicated to rote and ritual. He loves.

In Lent, ponder the loyalty of God as spilled across the pages of scripture. The story of Ruth not abandoning her mother in law. Joseph forgiving his brothers in spite of framing them for thievery. Jeremiah staying with his people, even to a mud pit. A crucified messiah with a jumbled message atop the cross beam of his crucifix. Love, not overlord. Loyalty instead of abandonment. Steadfast instead of weary. Lent is love.

Love

Lent - Day 39

42“But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Luke 11:42 (ESV)



In my first year of parenting, I learned the value of the diaper bag. You see, it does not only carry diapers. It is basically a bag of vitals if you want to travel with a newborn. Extra clothes, extra bottles, diapers, wipes, pacifier, spare pacifier, and sanitizing wipes for the public changing table all escort the baby as if they were the president in a motorcade. You can forget everything else: cash, cell phone, or even your own water, but you cannot forget that bag. You cannot neglect the most important thing. For Jesus and religious devotion, you could not exclude justice and love of God.

Getting a read on the Pharisees is no easy task. Historical literature about them proves lacking. Historians do not possess any of their writings or teachings. We know mostly about them from writings about them. And Jesus' teachings gives us a glimpse into their lives, and even these are vague. Jesus rebukes their religious devotion combined with their lack of justice and love for God.

You cannot have one without the other. He does not downplay religion. But he hates neglecting the most important thing: religion without love and justice. What does he mean? Read the entirety of chapter 11, and you find Jesus discounting the entire religious establishment of the Pharisees. Whether in the reverence for the prophets' tombs or their unwillingness to bear the burdens of their own teaching, Jesus exposed their absence of love for God.

As with the Pharisee, Jesus might ask us to evaluate our "religious" devotion. Is it driven by love or by praying to get our way? Do we find ourselves growing deeper in love and loyalty or driven by mindless devotion to please others? Is God's love stretching us or do we love with the same limits? If we neglect the main thing, we lose the whole thing.

Love

Lent - Day 40

⁸Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8 (ESV)

In fifth grade, I learned how to type on an electric typewriter. To cover mistakes, a button with a type of white ink would cover over the mistake. In a few years, I learned how to type on a home computer with a program called Word Perfect. Mistakes now erased with the push of a backspace button and even misspelled words disappeared, corrected by the computer. Many of us now own computers, and for documents, we easily replace our mistakes with a simple push. Documents now present our best selves, free of errors and misspellings. Jesus' love functions similarly.

One of Jesus' disciples instructs the church to eagerly love one another. Why? Because it covers over a multitude of sins. In life, we might experience the best and worst of human behavior, and love covers it over. It does not mean the mistake did not happen. It does not discount its consequences. It does not even erase the memory. However, it can cover over sin.

Peter tells them even further, "love earnestly." "Eagerly" and "zealously" capture this word's essence. Imagine someone telling you how to love. We might grow uncomfortable because love, as defined by our society, must be authentic and from one's true self. Alternatively, Peter envisions a Christian world where adherents eagerly love one another. They cover over gossip, past mistakes, and maybe even humiliation because of the love received from God.

As you look towards holy week, reflect on the love of Christ that leads you to eagerly love one another. Showing hospitality, welcoming stranger, forgiving enemy, and carrying forgiveness instead of bitterness demonstrate our understanding of carrying Jesus' cross out of love. As Christians eagerly love one another and cover over a multitude of sins, we demonstrate our love for Christ. The steps of Jesus cover sin; they do not perpetuate it. His cross covers over; it does not brood over past mistakes. His love is eager; it does not give up in hopelessness.

Consider enemies of the cross. Pray for them. Radical haters of Christians do not deserve our hatred. They deserve our prayer.

