

Reformed by the Word to Love

Matt 22:34-46

Let us pray: Father God, thank you for giving us the Bible in our own language. Your Word is sweeter than honey from the honeycomb. As we taste the sweetness of your Word today, strengthen us to follow you wholeheartedly. In the name of Jesus, the living Word. Amen.

A 6-year-old girl was sitting on the bed, watching her mother brush her hair. She noticed a few grey strands and asked, "Mommy, why are some of your hairs grey?" The mother decided to use this as a teachable moment to show how much she cared. She sighed gently and said, "Well, every time you disobey me, cry, or do something wrong, it breaks my heart a little, and one of my hairs turns grey."

The little girl thought about this deeply for a moment, looking at her mom's head. Then, her eyes lit up with sudden realization and she said, "Wow, Mommy... you must have been an absolute monster, because Grandma has a whole head of grey hair!"

A child who grows up hearing the voice of loving parents and receiving their care naturally learns how to share love with others. Love is not something that can be enforced by rules. It is something that is absorbed and learned through life itself. A child who receives loving nurture and discipline comes to love and respect his or her parents. Of course, no child can love a parent to the same degree that a parent loves a child. Yet when a parent's love is poured out, that child develops the capacity to love and share love with others.

The same is true in our relationship with God. A person who knows God's love through experience comes to love him. Love grows and matures as a relationship is built over time. Relationships are strengthened through sharing meals, spending time together, and engaging in conversation.

In today's passage, Jesus is speaking with the Pharisees. At that time, many religious leaders, including the Pharisees, had fallen into religious formalism. They divided the Ten Commandments into 613 detailed regulations and mistakenly believed that carefully keeping each one was the same as loving God. In their intense focus on obeying every rule, they lost sight of love, which was the very spirit of the Law. Their status as experts in the Law became a means of protecting their own privileges. Condemning those who failed to keep the Law became a source of power for them.

The purpose of the law was to make people aware of their sin. Therefore, it pointed to the coming of Christ, the Savior, who alone could forgive their sins and enable them to keep the law perfectly. Christ, to whom the law pointed, had come to them, yet they failed to recognize him. If they had taken the words of the Law and the Prophets truly seriously, they would have recognized Christ.

One of the experts in the law among the Pharisees tested Jesus by asking him, "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" This was a topic that experts in the law often debated with one another even in those days.

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Jesus drew two commandments from the Old Testament. The first was from Deuteronomy 6:5: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." He said, "This is the first and greatest commandment." Then he continued, "And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" This commandment comes from Leviticus 19:18.

Jesus joined these two commandments together through love, making them one. That is why he said, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

The Law and the Prophets refer to the entire Old Testament, and the law is at its heart. The fundamental spirit of the law is love for God. In other words, the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments of love. They are held together by them.

Why would Jesus say this to the expert in the law? In other words, we can understand Jesus as saying, "I want you to follow me, but I want you to follow me because you love me. I want you to follow me because you know my worth and value me."

But, brothers and sisters, when you look at these two commandments, do you think we are capable of loving in this way? How can we love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind? And how can we love our neighbors as ourselves? We cannot love in this way on our own.

Just as the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments, we too must cling to Christ, who is love itself. Only then can we receive from him the power to love, and we can simply become channels through which his love flows to others.

Then how can we receive the power of God's love? Earlier, I mentioned that children who grow up hearing their parents' voices often and receiving their love develop a capacity for love. God's love comes through his Word. God created the world through his Word, sends his Word to heal us, and gives us comfort and promises through it. Trusting that Word is faith.

As we listen attentively to God's voice, his heart is poured into us, and we begin to experience his love. Then, a reservoir of love begins to form within us, enabling us to love others. As a result, a life of love, as the law requires, begins to flow from us, and the law is fulfilled.

There is a saying that love is not love until it is expressed. Whether we love God's Word can be seen as an indicator of whether we love God. If our love for the Word has grown cold, we can say that our love for God has grown cold as well. For God, listening to his Word and storing it deep in our hearts is an expression of our love for him. When we store his Word abundantly in our hearts, we have much to draw from, and we begin to live according to his Word. But if his Word is not within us, we have to force ourselves to obey through sheer willpower. Then our faith becomes legalistic, leaving us exhausted and struggling.

Today is Reformation Sunday. At the very heart of the Reformation was the restoration of God's Word to all people. During the Middle Ages, the clergy had a monopoly on the Scriptures, and only those who knew Latin could read them. The Reformers translated the Bible into their own native languages, and with the invention of the printing press, more copies of the Bible could be printed and distributed. As a result,

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people became eager to learn to read so that they could read the Bible themselves in their own languages and develop an intimate relationship with God through his Word.

The sixteenth-century Reformation did not happen overnight. Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses ignited the movement, but it took more than a century of suffering by countless people to restore the authority of Scripture in people's lives, an authority that had been placed below that of the Church and the pope. It also took many years for the Word to become widely available.

William Tyndale was executed for translating the New Testament directly from the original Greek into English and having it printed. A few years later, when the King James Bible was produced, 83 percent of the New Testament retained Tyndale's translation.

The Church can stand firm only when it has the Word. That is why we need Bible translators and missionaries, such as those serving with Wycliffe Bible Translators, who translate the Scriptures into the languages of all peoples. Without the Word, we cannot truly know God, and the Church cannot stand firm. The Word must be proclaimed not only from the pulpit but also in the homes of believers and from the lips of each individual. Only then can the lives of individuals, their families, and the Church stand firm.

One famous saying left by the Reformers is, "The reformed church must always be reforming." Two centuries later, a pastor emerged in England who sought to reform the declining Church of England. He was John Wesley, the second reformer.

At that time, the Church of England was like a church that believed with its head, through doctrine, but whose heart, through experience, and hands and feet, through practice, had become lifeless. In my view, one of the most important aspects of Wesley's reform was that he brought the Word, which had once again become confined within the church's liturgy, into people's hearts so that they could experience it deeply and passionately. Through the small-group system called class meetings, he enabled people to examine and share their lives and faith with one another in the light of the Word, allowing the Word to directly influence their lives and become a lived experience.

What is the situation of The United Methodist Church today? We see the need for reform once again. Just as the Reformation began with one person, reform begins with "me." The transformation of each one of us will become the transformation of our community.

What kind of reform should we pursue? As Jesus tells us in today's passage, it should be a reform that holds fast to love.

Returning to today's passage, Jesus asks the Pharisees, "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They answer, "The son of David." They knew well the Old Testament prophecies that the Messiah would come from the lineage of David.

Then Jesus asks them another question: "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your

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feet.”” Jesus is raising a profound question, quoting Psalm 110:1. In the original text, it reads, “Jehovah (Yahweh) says to my lord.” Who is “my lord”? He is referring to the Messiah.

Jesus concludes by saying, “If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

The Jews of that time were waiting only for a Messiah in the flesh. They expected a political and military Messiah who would restore the nation of Israel to its former glory under the dynasty of King David. They had never considered a Messiah who would deliver humanity from sin and death.

Through this passage from Psalms, Jesus was reminding them that Christ came as a descendant of David according to his human lineage, making him fully human, yet he was also fully divine because he came through the Spirit of holiness.

The apostle Paul later came to understand this truth and expressed it in Romans 1:3-4: “regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”

If the Pharisees had acknowledged that they did not fully understand the Scriptures, I believe they might have asked Jesus more questions and learned from him, eventually coming to believe that he was the Christ. Because Jesus so graciously explained the Scriptures that pointed to himself, even to those who did not believe in him, we later find in the book of Acts that some Pharisees came to believe.

Jesus is now present with us in the Spirit, but we cannot see him with our eyes. What we can hold in our hands is the Bible, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Lord wants to speak words of love to us. Because he loved us first, as we store his Word in our hearts, we come to love him.

When we love the Lord, rather than merely trying to keep the law, we will become witnesses who see the law being fulfilled in our lives. Rather than struggling to keep the law, I encourage you to focus on loving the Lord more deeply. When you and I love the Lord, we will be set free from the law.

On this Reformation Sunday, I pray that all of us will rediscover Christ in the Word through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, experience God's love anew, and follow the Lord in love, just as David did. Amen.

Let us pray: Loving God, forgive us if we have ever taken Your Word lightly, even though it was given to us at the cost of the labor and lives of so many Reformers. Help us to keep the Word You have placed in our hands daily on our lips and in our ears. May we experience more deeply each day, through Your Word, the love You showed us first, even while we were still sinners. May we devote our entire lives to loving You, our Lord, with all our heart, soul, and mind. May that love flow out to others so that they, too, may come to know Your love. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is love itself. Amen.