

## **Hard to Love**

*Posted on August 6, 2019 by kathyrandall*

I recorded this one, and you can hear Roar "help" me preach.

*Love, the Lord your God  
with all your heart and all your soul  
and all your mind  
and love humankind,  
as God has loved yourself  
Love, the Lord your God  
with all your heart and all your soul  
and mind and humankind,  
we've got Jesus Christ to give  
we've got Jesus Christ to live  
we've got nothing to hide  
because  
we live and abide in love.*

John 15:9-17 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

[Jesus says]

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

*This is the Word of God for all people.*

***Thanks be to God.***

**Hard to Love** Rev. Kathy Randall Bryant

This command is the hardest one to follow.

We can talk about loving someone until we are blue in the face, it is really easy to fall in love with someone, but staying in love is another problem entirely.

We don't understand the difficulty and importance of this commandment until someone gets really hard to love.

Perhaps they just stand on the other side of the argument, and you really don't understand them.

But when someone stands on the other side of an argument, if we are not using love as the frame for our reference, love as the lens through which we look, then we will see through another lens.

Instead of rose colored glasses we see the dirty green tint of hate and jealousy. It sneaks up on us. It might start as a snide comment. Maybe a dismissing remark.

Soon enough, there is a distinct line between Them and Us. It's almost too easy. Labels are thrown about and stick far too easily. The dividing line between the camps becomes wider, and it becomes less and less likely that the two groups will be able to see eye-to-eye.

It's easy to point to the political divide in our country as an example, but this division can sink in much closer to home.

I am deeply concerned about this. I'm concerned about my own bias because when it happens to me I am sure that it has been affecting how I think about those who disagree with me. It's become more than merely thinking that those who think differently than me are wrong. I have gone so far into this thinking that I believe that they are misguided, blinded, ill-informed, dupes in a cosmic parody.

It's not healthy.

I am creating a prison for my mind.

I am sinning. My bias is leading me to sin more.

I am missing out on seeing the image of God in others. I am missing out on the full representation of the body of Christ.

I don't want to be this way.

Changing my heart will not be easy. I cannot do it on my own.

I struggle with losing compassion, and wanting to take the easy route of not seeing those around me as full people. It would be much more easy to return to my blissful ignorance than to work hard to move past my own biases to see the full image of God of the person in front of me. My love isn't big enough. My heart isn't open enough. I need to look through the eyes of Christ in order to love and see deeply enough.

This kind of division can split families, and keep parents and children from speaking for decades.

It happens far too often.

And maybe it is because of a complete offense or abuse, but sometimes it happens because someone gets angry, and then chooses to cut their family member off.

Instead of holding the power of silence over someone, imagine what could happen if we were daring enough to work through some of the most difficult conversations that we are bound to have with someone else.

Imagine what could happen in the midst of strife if folks take to heart what Jesus says and does by example here in the scriptures: to lay down one's life for another. And laying down your life is not only dying for someone, but also being willing to not have the last word, to not win each and every argument, to listen, and not to always have your way.

Indeed, we have been loved by Christ, and we are not called servants any longer, no, instead we are friends of Christ. We are chosen by Christ. We have been called up into the family of God and we are now being brought into perfection through the grace of God.

It is a long road indeed.

Have you ever heard the story of "Old Turtle and the Broken Truth"?

This little turtle finds a rock, with something written on it: "you are loved."

He keeps it, then shows it to mother, father, siblings, and finally the chief hears about it.

The village puts it in a place of honor.

A village from across the river sees it.

They decide they want it.

War breaks out.

Death, disease, famine, horrible anger and madness follow.

The broken truth changes hands so often that it eventually gets lost again.

Later, Little turtle finds it, but he also finds the other piece that belonged with it. They do fit together, they are part of a whole.

Along with "you are loved" is the rest of the truth, "and so are they."

Old Turtle And The Broken Truth – October 1, 2003

by Douglas Wood (Author), Jon J Muth (Illustrator)

See, after we get so caught up in how we are different, with who has wronged whom, with tallies and scores and who is winning the argument, we lose sight of the full truth. When our fighting grows so strong that we fail to see that there is more to the truth than just the love for ourselves, we break the truth into ever continuing tinier pieces, jagged and rough, dangerous shards of the original message. It becomes a truth that has broken and breaks others.

We are children of God, and like a mother that despairs to see her children fighting, God mourns the ways that we have become divided over so many things.

The mass shootings in El Paso, Texas and all the mass shootings we keep seeing in our country are signs of this. This brokenness that we have. The way that people have set themselves above other people.

When I was little, my sister and I used to fight some. We were siblings. My mother, wise woman that she was, and still is, made us hug to make amends after we fought. She would make us hug and just sit there, as we realized what our fighting was doing.

Granted, it was just in our family, you wouldn't think that there were any other repercussions. But the lesson has stuck with me, as I have grown and matured.

I went to Kenya twice. The second time I went with some fellow students from seminary. One of them was Laura, we had been good friends our first year, studying together and hanging out, but I hadn't really hung out with her recently when we went together.

And we had a falling out while we were overseas.

Let me just tell you, fighting with someone while eight thousand miles from home is not fun.

Especially when you fight like I do, in small jabs and snide remarks. I'm not a very clean fighter.

REPORT 7-0-AD

But, when we got back to the US, we had another week or two at our host congregation before the end of the summer. And we worked through it. I had more to apologize for than she did. She forgave me. We came together and created reconciliation.

One of the images that she used in being thankful that we had come through our argument and ended up on the other side is that of a stone smoothing another stone by grinding each other's rough spots.

The Peace we had and continue to share afterwards is so much more valuable because we came through conflict in order to reach it.

Peace came from our loving each other through the hard parts.

We weren't afraid to serve each other and learn from each other.

We are called and chosen as children of God.

God mourns the fighting of God's Children.

And fighting is not the fruit of the love of God.

No, the fruit of the love of God is the peace that passes all understanding.

John writes about this in 1 John 4:7-12 (NRSV)

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us." (NRSV)

We don't love because we are afraid of punishment,

we choose love because God's love is perfected IN US.

We don't love perfectly on our own

God acts so that we can know that God views us with the same love as God views God's son.

Love is from God.

To know love is to know God.

The only way we love as God loves us is to allow God to love THROUGH us.

Love shows us what is broken.

Love is what we need to heal.

If God is love, then love is: past, present, and future.

Love is. Love has been. Love will be.

Christ invites us, chooses us, desires for us to live in, remain in, dwell in, ABIDE in his love.

Jesus says: at the beginning, I chose you, and now I choose you over and over again.

Christ expressed the greatest love, by coming to be with us, to descend his life to ours.

Jesus speaks more than words to us, Jesus has displayed how deep his love is for us.

We are invited to bear the fruit of living in God's deep and abiding love.

It won't be easy. Sometimes the folks we are most called to love are the hardest ones TO LOVE.

Love is hard. If nothing else, being a parent for over four years, staying married for over eight years and in relationship for ten years will teach you that.

Love. is. hard.

And for those of you who have been together for longer than My husband and I, you know that.

But you really can't teach it.

It is only something you can learn from experience.

And then, once you think you've got it down one week, the next month something will change, and then there are new people and new relationships and new things to learn.

God says you are worthy of love. God says you are worthy of friendship and welcome and grace. It is part of your intrinsic being, no matter what you do or say. God loves you and wants you to share that love with those around you, so that you can experience even more the way that God loves you. And I want to keep learning about how God loves.

God knit you together in the womb of your mother and loved you and said you were very good. Supremely good. God loves you and we are all working on learning from God.

God is the only one who is perfect. God is the one who gave a perfect son to show us how love can be perfected in life here on earth, and I am working each day to be made perfect in love. I don't expect to get it right today, tomorrow, or next year, but that doesn't give me a reason not to work at it right now. I'm trying to love the way God loves.

We won't always get it right. We will make mistakes. We have scars and wounds and memories of times when we didn't feel loved.

Jesus always leads by example,

loving his dense, misguided disciples,

loving those who accused him of horrible things

loving those who spit in his face

loving those who nailed him to a tree.

Because Jesus has chosen us as his friends and fellow brothers and sisters, his siblings together in love, we are able to strive to live into these commands that he has for us, to love those around us with the same kind of daring that he demonstrated over and over and over again.

You are loved because you are made in the image of God. Each of you. You are worthy of love.

God calls you to live into this love, loving others as God loves you.

*Love, the Lord your God*

*with all your heart and all your soul*

*and all your mind*

*and love humankind,*

*as God has loved yourself*

*Love, the Lord your God*

*with all your heart and all your soul*

*and mind and humankind,*

*we've got Jesus Christ to give*

*we've got Jesus Christ to live*

*we've got nothing to hide*

*because*

*we live and abide in love.*

And so we love, as best we can, through the power of God.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.