

Self-Love

Matthew 22:35-40

Oct. 25, 2020

Love your God and love your neighbors. This is the greatest commandment the Lord has given us. This is what the disciples of Jesus Christ are called to do daily and faithfully. We, Fairfield Grace church family and friends strive to obey these two commandments, loving God and loving others all the time.

Every time we are reminded of this commandment, we are aware that loving God and loving others are not two different commandments. The Lord said, “the second is like the first one. Love your neighbors as you love yourself.” What he says that loving God and loving others are co-dependent and connected.

So John the Apostle writes to the early Christians, “11, Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.” (1 John 4:11-12)

He further writes, “19 We love because he first loved us. 20Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”

I have been asking myself every night before going to bed, “Kun Sam, did you love God and love others today?”

There is one interesting point in this greatest commandment. The Lord said, “And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Eugene Peterson translates this way, “Love others as well as you love yourself.’ (The Message)

Did you hear what he said? Love your neighbor **as yourself**. How to love your neighbor? How to love others? The Lord shows us how. As you love yourself. As well as you love yourself. Notice that Jesus does not say we are to love our neighbors or others instead of ourselves. What he says is that loving others is based on and begins with loving ourselves. The Lord wants us to love ourselves!

Do you love yourself? Do you love everything about you?

“Self-love” is something positive and good. Self-love has been understood something we should avoid and resist. We talk about self-denial as a Christian virtue and

misunderstand self-love is against self-denial. Authentic self-love is always healthy and life-giving. Jesus wants us to love ourselves.

“Self-love” is not same as “self-centeredness.” Surely, “self-centeredness” is something we ought not to fall into. It is not healthy and good, because the self-centered person place himself or herself at the center of life and think everything turns around him or her and push God to the edge.

Do you remember Narcissus, the character from Greek mythology? Narcissus was a youth who was gazing at his reflection in a well one day. The more he stared, the more enamored of himself he became. He fell in love with himself, forgot about everything else, tumbled into the water and drowned. Surely, we should be careful not to fall into narcissism. Instead, we should do have an authentic self-love, which leads us a healthy and life-giving Christian life.

Many of us, no, all of us one way or another had painful damage in our self-image as we grew up. Directly or indirectly we got hurt by people, including our parents, siblings, friends, neighbors, leaders, such as teachers and pastors, saying, “you are stupid. You are dumb. You are ugly. You are fat or skinny. You are too short. You are too tall. You are impossible.” Those hurtful and degrading words came to us like a sharp arrow and stayed with us for a long time. Painfully and unfortunately, we embraced a negative self-image they gave us. And we began to dislike and disbelieve ourselves.

A mom came back home from work. She was stressful and tired. When her 7 year old daughter, Jackie sang freely and happily songs she learned at school at the dinner table, she yelled at her, saying, “Shut up, Jackie! What a terrible voice you carry. You sound like an ugly duck. You are not born to be a singer.” That was a big blow to Jackie. Since then, she stopped singing for the rest of her life. She did not like not only her voice but also herself. She lost her self-love.

Where there is no self-love, there is no self-confidence and no self-respect. No self-love eventually leads to life full of anxiety and worries and even anger, which is unhealthy and miserable. We need to reclaim our true and real identity and regain our self-love.

Who are we?

We are God’s masterpieces.

Genesis 1 tells us that God created all over 6 days. Every day after God created something out of nothing, he said, “It is good.” On the sixth day after God created human beings, God said, “It is very good.” You are God’s wonderful and beautiful creation.

God has created each one of us beautifully in the image of God. No one is alike. Even twins have different fingerprints. Imagine that everyone of more than 7.6 billion people in this world have different look, different DNA and unique fingerprint. Why does God create each one of us differently? Because each one of us is precious.

Psalmist sings, “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.” (Psalm 8:3-5) That’s what the Bible thinks of you – “a little less than God”.

Jesus came to the world to let us know how precious and beautiful and wonderful we are. Why did Jesus heal the sick? Because they are precious. Why did Jesus set those imprisoned by fear and despair? Because they are precious. Why did Jesus open the eyes of the blind? Because they are precious. Why did Jesus have dinner with all those sinners? Because they are precious. Why did Jesus die on the cross for us? Because we are precious. Yes, we are precious children of God. We are daughters and sons of God whom God loves and cares for. Christ has died for us and God has reclaimed us as the sons and daughters of God! Wow!

Listen one more time.

No matter who you are – no matter what your background or your life experiences – there is something about you worth loving because you are a child of God! You are a unique, unrepeatable miracle of God’s creative power. There is no one in all the world exactly like you. It is good to be who you are. You can love and affirm yourself no matter what, because your worth is not dependent upon your appearance, or your ability, or your performance. You are a person of worth because you are a child of God – you are one for whom Christ has died.

Do not worry about thinking too highly of yourself. As long as you remember that all good gifts come from God, celebrating all the good things about you will be a way of giving thanksgiving to God rather than showing pride.

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I was 19 years old when I immigrated to California from South Korea. It is about 43 years ago. I had really difficult times to settle in a new land. Everything was so foreign to me. Language and culture. I had an identity crisis. Who am I?

What is your name? Kun Sam. What? Koon Sam? I was so uncomfortable and embarrassed that I decided to change my name to Mitch. I got this name from a movie where a young white man enjoyed riding a motorcycle with his blonde girl friend in the back. My Korean friends commented me, saying, “Are you crazy?” Mitch sounds like

“mitcher,” meaning crazy, out of mind in Korean. So I searched another name. Kun in Kun Sam is a name my brothers share with me. My brothers are Kun Kap and Kun Hyung and my twin brother is Kun Jung. So Sam is my unique name. I looked for a name beginning with Sam. Samuel and Samson. I am not big. So I chose Samuel as my name. My name story is not over yet. When I was in the Seminary in New York City, my academic advisor, Dr. James Cone, black theologian asked me one day, what is your name? “Samuel!” He asked two more times and I answered, “Samuel” two more times. He asked me with a smile, “Are you a Jew?” It was a turning point in my life. It was a conversion experience. I got my Korean name back and reclaimed my Korean American identity.

By the grace of God, I was able to give thanks to God has sent me to this world as a Korean born in Korean Peninsula. I was able to see that God has sent me to America and enabled me to live as a Korean American.

Furthermore, thankfully, I was able to see there are many other Americans here in this land. English American, Polish American, Irish American, Italian American, French American, Native American, Latino American, Latina American, Asian American, Black American, Afro American, and many other Americans. All these diverse Americans are God’s beautiful creation visible in this land.

Let me close this morning’s message to share a video clip, titled, “I interrupted a racial joke”

Jesus commands us to love others as we love ourselves. As well as we honor ourselves as God’s masterpieces, we honor others as God’s masterpieces. As well as we respect ourselves, we respect others. As well as we love ourselves, we love others.

“Love others as you love yourself.” This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.