

Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta
“Love is All You Need” (Romans 13:8-10)
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Dave Johnson

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Fifty years ago the most famous and influential band in the history of pop music—ever, bar none—broke up. Of course I’m talking about the Beatles (who else?). A few years prior a British production entitled *Our World*, was broadcast, the first ever live global satellite television event. It was watched by nearly half a billion people around the world. On this broadcast the Beatles performed a song written by John Lennon, a song that you know, a song that is very repetitious, a song that emphasizes the most important thing in the world:

Love, love, love
Love, love, love
Love, love, love
There’s nothing you can do that can’t be done
Nothing you can sing that can’t be sung
Nothing you can say but you can learn how to play the game
It’s easy
Nothing you can make that can’t be made
No one you can save that can’t be saved
Nothing you can do but you can learn how to be you in time
It’s easy
All you need is love
All you need is love
All you need is love, love
Love is all you need
(From “All You Need is Love” on their 1967 album *Magical Mystery Tour*)

Now that song is in your head, and trust me, it will stay there for a while. But it’s not a bad song to have stuck in your head, because it’s true. All you need is love. It may sound trite, naïve, Pollyannish—but it’s still true. Two years earlier Jackie DeShannon sang a similar song by the legendary Hal David and Burt Bacharach:

What the world needs now is love, sweet love
It's the only thing that there's just too little of
What the world needs now is love, sweet love
Not just for some but for everyone
(From her 1965 hit "What the World Needs Now is Love")

Again, this may sound too simplistic, but is it? In the world right now do we need more anger? More anxiety? More finger pointing? More arguments? More violence? Do you need more of those things in your life or in your family's life? Probably not. But if you're anything like me you always need more love. Jackie DeShannon was exactly right, "what the world needs now is love, sweet love"...and John Lennon was also exactly right, "all you need is love."

Apparently the Apostle Paul agreed as well, for in today's passage from his Letter to the Romans he put it this way:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:8-11).

When it comes to fulfilling the law, all you need is love. Jesus said the same thing in a slightly different way when he was asked by a lawyer, "Teacher, which commandment is the law is the greatest?" and as you already know, he replied:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:36-40).

"Love the Lord your God," Jesus said, "love your neighbor as yourself." Going back to Paul..."love one another...the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." This is the case with every one of the Ten Commandments, including the four specified by Paul—"You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet."

Lest you think all this talk about love fulfilling the law is over simplistic, too good to be true, or outright dismissive of God's law, let's see what Jesus had to say about these four commandments. How about the two most uncomfortable ones first, the ones about murder and adultery (everyone's favorite two of the Ten Commandments)? In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus did not water down or mitigate these two commandments; rather, he turned up the heat even more. Jesus preached this about adultery: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). Well, if that is really the case, then I speak for all of us when I say... "Yikes!"

Likewise in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had this to say about murder:

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire (Matthew 5:21-22).

Who are angry at right now? Again, Jesus turns up the heat even more by going past the outward acts to what is actually in our hearts... "Uh-oh!"

What about the commandment, "You shall not steal"? Again in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preached, "Do not resist an evil doer. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well" (Matthew 5:39-40). In other words, if someone tries to steal from you, give them even more than they want. That's what love looks like.

And finally, what did Jesus have to say about the commandment "You shall not covet?" I mean, when it comes to consumerism, enough is never enough, right? Jesus warned, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15). Again, Jesus turns up the heat when he told a rich young man, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21). It's just stuff.

Again, in today's passage Paul wrote, "the one who loves another has fulfilled the law...love is the fulfilling of the law." And back once more to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount ...he proclaimed:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished (Matthew 5:17-18).

So the question is, when? When did Jesus fulfill the law? When did Jesus accomplish every single nuance of God's law, every letter of God's law, every stroke of a letter of God's law, all of it? On Good Friday.

On Good Friday Jesus absorbed the fierce hateful anger of the world and let that world kill him. On Good Friday Jesus let the soldiers steal his very clothes. On Good Friday Jesus gave everything he had away, even his life. Jesus never committed adultery. Jesus never murdered anyone. Jesus never stole from anyone. Jesus never coveted what belonged to other people...and yet out of love Jesus still fulfilled the law in our place because yes, as Paul wrote, "the one who loves another has fulfilled the law" and yes, "love is the fulfilling of the law."

On the cross Jesus fulfilled the law for you, fulfilled the law for me, and fulfilled the law for the whole world because on the cross Jesus loved his Heavenly Father with all his heart and soul and mind, because on the cross Jesus loved you as himself. As Jesus hung upon the cross Jesus loved and loved and loved...and in so doing fulfilled the law because love is the one thing, the only thing, upon which hang the law and the prophets, the entire Old Testament. On Good Friday Jesus gave the world what the world needed then—love, sweet love—and at this very moment the Risen Jesus still gives what the world needs now, love sweet love. That's what love looks like.

Back to John Lennon for a moment and then I'll close...John Lennon had two sons, Julian and Sean. Julian was only 17 years old when his dad was shot outside his apartment building in New York on December 8, 1980. But as recorded in an article a friend recently sent me, before his untimely death John had promised something very specific to his son Julian:

“Dad said to me should he pass away, if there was any way of letting me know he was going to be okay, the message would come to me in the form of a white feather,” he says. Julian hoped for this sign, but as time went by it seemed less and less likely. Twenty-three years after his father’s death, Julian was touring with his own band in Australia. He noticed a large crowd of people in the hotel lobby. They weren’t fans, but the members of the aboriginal Mirning tribe. And they wanted to speak with him. The tribe’s leader explained that they’d been thrown off of their land. “You have a voice,” she said. “Will you speak for us?” Then, she handed him something. A white swan’s feather. “The goosebumps hit, big time,” says Julian. That day, Julian got more than an assurance that his father was alright (*Guideposts* 9/18/19).

And Julian’s father was right, “love is all you need.”

Today may God give you a different white feather, a white feather from the white dove of the Holy Spirit, to assure you that when it comes to your relationship with God, Jesus has fulfilled the law for you.

And may the same Holy Spirit lead all of us to respond to God’s love by giving to others what the world needs now...love, sweet love.

Amen.