

Everybody Needs Somebody to Love    Gen. 1:26-27; Luke 10:25-28;

I Cor. 13:1-6

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During the weeks before Christmas, an ad by Amazon was all over TV. It featured the song, “Everybody Needs Somebody to Love,” and I really loved it. Take a look! (video/song goes here)

What struck me about the song is that in contrast to most love songs that talk about our need to be loved, the title of this song focuses on our need to love others. Everybody needs somebody to love. I think most of us intuitively know this to be true. Morrie Schwartz, of Tuesdays with Morrie fame said, “We must love one another or die. It’s a very simple lesson.” But this lesson runs counter to many cultural currents. Those currents tell us to focus on loving ourselves; Only then should we worry about the needs of others. Of course, the problem is that our own needs are a bottomless pit that can never be filled, so there is never enough left over to give to others! Another cultural assumption is that if we just had all the latest gadgets and the best job and enough money, then we would be fulfilled. But that doesn’t seem to work, either. Perhaps the song is right: everybody just needs somebody to love!

Let’s look at three scripture passages that expand on this idea. The first one is foundational, found all the way back in Genesis 1, where God creates human beings. <sup>26</sup>*Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our*

*image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26,27)*

God makes human beings in his image. Theologians have wrestled for centuries over exactly what it means to be made in the image of God. Some have suggested that being made in God’s image is about our ability to reason. Unlike other animals, we can think and plan. Other theologians focus on our creativity. We are like God because we can create. Still others point to our ability to rule over the earth. There is probably some truth in all of those insights. But what if the essential way we are made in God’s image is our ability to love? After all God is love!

God’s love is active first of all in the Godhead, in the Trinity itself, where Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are together in a self-giving communion. And then God’s love spills out to others when God creates all that there is, and then loves all of his creatures. Being made in the image of God means that we reflect the love of our Creator. And that means we can never find fulfillment until we find somebody to love. The writers of that pop tune were on to something!

Now we need to pause here to define what we mean by the word “love.” The Bible itself makes use of three different Greek words for love, celebrating all of them in a positive way. The first is “eros”- romantic, passionate love. It’s probably the kind of love that the writers of the song had in mind. And there’s nothing wrong with this kind of love. A whole book of the Bible, Song of Solomon, celebrates this kind of love, and I highly recommend it, too!

A second kind of love, “phileo,” from which the city of Philadelphia gets its name, is about friendship love. It’s a mutual bond, like the bond between brothers or sisters. Most of us know the rewards of good friendships. And the Bible also speaks positively about this kind of love.

Finally, there is “agape,” which is the most common word the Bible uses when it talks about love. It’s the word usually used to describe God’s love for us. It’s a sacrificial love committed to act in the best interest of the other person. It’s not primarily about feeling a certain way toward someone. It’s about how we act. The biblical commands to love one another always use this word. With that in mind, let’s look at what Jesus has to say about our need to love others.

*<sup>25</sup>Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup>He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” <sup>27</sup>He answered, “You shall love the Lord your*

*God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”* <sup>28</sup>And he said to him, *“You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”* (Luke 10:25-28)

Here, Jesus affirms the insight of the religious lawyer that the most important commandments are to love God and to love our neighbors. That makes perfect sense if we're made in the image of God, doesn't it? But the lawyer in the story, trying to justify himself, asks Jesus who exactly is his neighbor- apparently trying to narrow the scope of what's required of him.

<sup>30</sup>*Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.* <sup>31</sup>*Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.* <sup>32</sup>*So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.* <sup>33</sup>*But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.* <sup>34</sup>*He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.* <sup>35</sup>*The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’* <sup>36</sup>*Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of*

*the robbers?”* <sup>37</sup>*He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”* (Luke 10:30-37)

Jesus says that only the Samaritan fulfilled the command to love your neighbor. And, it was because of the way he acted in the situation. Everybody needs somebody to love. In this case, the Samaritan loved the robbed and beaten man by caring for him.

So, we’re created to love, and one of the two greatest commandments is to love others.

Let’s look a little deeper at what love looks like. Paul writes a wonderful essay about love in I Cor. 13. It’s often quoted at weddings, even though it’s not really about romantic love. Here are the first few verses. <sup>4</sup>*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant* <sup>5</sup>*or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;* <sup>6</sup>*it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.* <sup>7</sup>*It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* (I Cor. 13:4-7)

Notice that the kind of love in I Cor. 13 isn’t about making yourself feel happy thoughts toward someone, which rarely works anyway! It’s about how we act toward other people. We can act in loving ways toward someone regardless of our feelings at a particular time. We can act with patience, kindness, courtesy, and without irritability or resentment.

And this is precisely the kind of love that we need to exercise for the good of our souls. Somewhere along the way, most of us have suffered losses and disappointments and hurts and heartaches that have caused our hearts to turn inward, partly to protect ourselves from further hurt. Like those religious leaders in Jesus' story, we find it easier and easier to turn away from those in need. But the longer we resist loving others, the harder our hearts become, and our souls begin to shrivel up and die, as Morrie Schwartz pointed out.

Some of the best characters in our favorite stories spotlight this reality. Ebenezer Scrooge and the Grinch come to mind. In both cases, their hearts and souls had become shriveled, oblivious to and even contemptuous of the real needs of others. They had lost the ability to love, and in losing that ability, they lost their souls. They needed to be saved from themselves, to be redeemed, to learn to love others again. And they needed it for their own good! Zora Neale Hurston put it like this: "Love makes your soul crawl out from its hiding place."

So where do we go from here? If everybody needs somebody to love, what do you do if you've forgotten how to do that? I'd suggest starting small. Ask God to bring someone to mind whom you can begin to love in small ways. If no one comes to mind, start with your spouse, or your children, or your parents, a co-worker, a fellow student, or even one of your

pastors! Begin by treating them with patience and kindness and compassion. It may not be easy for you, especially if you're out of practice! But, for the good of your own soul, get started. God wants to help you become the loving person he created you to be, so you'll have his help.

I close with a story about Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Shortly before his assassination, Rev. King addressed his congregation at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church. He told them that if any of them were around when he left this earth that he wanted a short funeral. And he didn't want people talking about his accomplishments- his hundreds of awards, his academic degrees, or even his Nobel Peace Prize. He said those things weren't important. What he really wanted was for the preacher to say that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to love somebody. That was it. May it be that way for each of us!