

We have Good News today. John Lennon got it exactly right when he wrote it and the Beatles sang it in June of 1967, sang it to some 400 million people from 26 countries tuned into watch the Beatles on what was the first worldwide television broadcast:

All you need is love, all you need is love,
All you need is love, love, love is all you need.

Long before the turbulent 60s when barbarous violence was sweeping Europe in the fifth century, a saintly bishop from Tunisia declared that the sum of Christian life amounted to “loving God and doing as you please.”

Indeed, Saint Augustine could have just as well said (or sung) it—all you need is love, love, love is all you need.

If we love God, we will want to please God and to please God you need only to love God and your neighbor.

That’s what Jesus said some 19 centuries before Lennon and 4 centuries before Augustine.

Jesus, as our Gospel reading this morning indicates, was answering a question put to him, what is the most important thing?

As the Book of Common Prayer so beautifully renders it:

Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ saith:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (BCP 324).

Indeed, all you need is love, love, love is all you need.

And that love echoes throughout the scriptures this morning.

In Leviticus, from which Jesus himself drew, we see God is holy and made in the image of this holy God we are to make this love concrete through righteous action and holy living, capped off with the exhortation to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Paul, in his first letter to the Thessalonians (believed to be the first words of what we call the New Testament), is insistent that amidst whatever it is we face, we are to proclaim and to live the Gospel . . . which is love.

This love which is Gospel leaves us rejoicing: as the popular praise song goes, I'm so glad you came to save us, you came from heaven to earth to show the way, from the earth to the cross my debt to pay, from the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky, Lord, I lift your name on high.

Yes, no greater love has a person, Jesus declares, than laying down his life for his friend. And at the very heart of the Gospel this is exactly what God in Christ does: lays down his life for you and for me . . . for the whole world.

This is love, meaty and solid, fleshy and real love, love which dares to let go of self for the sake of the beloved, to lay its own life down for others.

All you need is love, love, love is all you need.

Roses and romance? Okay. Champagne and caviar? Maybe. Or kicked back in matching bathtubs on the deck? Aaahh.

The many things we in our culture associate with love—so deeply, perhaps inextricably, connected to good feelings—is only a part of what love is. The feelings we associate with love—and this is something we need to remind ourselves of again and again and again—is but icing on a rich and delectable cake, for as we know deep in our hearts our feelings are all too fickle, much like the breeze that catches our face on hot day, lovely, refreshing, but not solid and substantial ground we can stand and build our lives on, at least not lives oriented toward love.

No, real love is much deeper, daring to love when there is no evident reason to love. Real love risks, and indeed sometimes loses, all for the object of our love.

The bard William Shakespeare spoke of the indefectibility of love in Sonnet 116:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove:
 O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;

It is the star to every wandering bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come:
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

This is real, solid love, the kind of love we want deep in our bones, and even if it may not actually be, as another popular song says, the kind of love we “deserve,” it *is* the kind of love with which God loves you, me, and so loved the world . . . the kind of love with which God invites, indeed commands, us to love others.

This love is not so a feeling drifting with the breeze but a rock solid commitment: I may not always agree with you, I may not at times even like you. But with all that I have and all that I am I love you . . . no matter what.

I read the other day an interesting “status update” of a Facebook friend.

Apparently she asked her significant other, “do you love me?,” and got the hoped for answer “Yes.” “Why?” she asked. “Well, I don’t know; it just starts at my toes and goes to my brain.” She had to admit that *that* worked for her.

With all that I am and all that I have—from my toes to my head—I love you.

This complete toes-to-head kind of love is what we read in the Song of Solomon as love which is stronger than the grave, something that can be wounded and even die but rises to new life again.

For you and I have seen the glory—and the love—of God in the face . . . and in the wounded feet, the bloody hands, the pierced side . . . of Jesus who says, I love you *this* much [arms stretched out as upon the cross]: now go and love others *this* much.

Toes-to-head love, total and complete, whole and holy.

Indeed

All you need is love, all you need is love,
 All you need is love, love, love is all you need.