

**All Saints'**  
**Sunday, April 25, 2021**  
**The Rev. Kathy Boss**

Recently on Facebook, I came across a meme that laid out the Golden Rule as set forth by multiple religions and ways of life

- Buddhism: Hurt not others with that which pains yourself
- Christianity: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you
- Hinduism: Treat others as you would yourself be treated
- Islam: Do unto all people as you would wish to have done to you
- Judaism: What you hate in yourself, do to no person
- Native American: Live in harmony, for we are all related.

On the surface this core tenet for living rightly seems straight forward. Be nice. It's all a give and take. But we all know it's anything but.

The thing is, it isn't enough to go through the motions. Doing the right thing does not necessarily set us in harmony with one another. Being pious, following the laws, being righteous, while it may feel good, can fail to illuminate our deep and necessary interconnections with one another, including all of our mineral, plant and animal siblings on this beautiful planet. It may even obscure it. Without love, it can drive us to the belief that we have it all right, that, in fact, we are somehow separated off from others, special...better, and therefore justified in using them for our own gain.

Love, God, is at the core. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind. That comes first. Put love at the center, at the core of who you are. Then the second commandment, the Golden Rule, takes root in a fertile soil.

In today's Collect we ask to hear Jesus' voice, to follow him. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leads us always to the path of love. He loves us, and sets for us an example of love.

In the reading from Acts today, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, invokes Jesus' name before a tribunal of leaders, summoned there for a good deed done. The leaders ask "By what power" was this done. The Jesus movement is gaining momentum, becoming something with power behind it. This healing, therefore, is cause for concern.

God in the Holy Spirit fills Peter. Peter invokes the name of the Good Shepherd, the one who loves, the one who laid down and took up his life again, the name of Jesus. Peter invokes all that Jesus represents, all that Jesus modeled, all that Jesus offers to the world. Peter invokes love embodied. The cornerstone. The salvation of us all.

And if we are wondering what it means to love, for that is no easy question, our epistle today offers us an answer, though it is a tall order. We must love not in word or speech, but in truth and action. Truth and action. Love in our hearts, put it at the center of our beings in all that we do. Jesus abides in us.

We are living in a culture where individualism and profit hold sway. Where the love that connects us all, can get lost in the cacophony of advertising, and consumption. Where comfort is placed over our own authority to sacrifice for one another, to care for our earth and one another. To love beyond our own little circle. And we are seeing the repercussions of this. But it's changing. COVID has, if nothing else, made it clear that we are all deeply interconnected. And the impact of our actions on our mother earth have made it clear that being in right relationship with our planet matters. Love in truth and action, matters.

What's inside of us matters. Going through the motions is not enough. Self-examination, the cultivation of deep love and compassion matters. Intention will always spill over into reality.

In today's Gospel, Our Good Shepherd, whose voice we hear and follow, is speaking to leaders, to the Pharisees. This parable illustrates different paths to leadership. The hired hand who does not love the sheep, who does not feel connected with them, but instead is interested only in what they can extract from their work with the sheep, runs away when push comes to shove. They are unwilling to risk themselves for the sheep. The thieves climb over the fences, they don't bother to go through the gate, they come in the night and take.

The Good Shepherd, on the other hand, is connected to the sheep, he knows them, and they know him. He is willing to lay down his life if necessary because he loves them, because he knows them, and they know him. And this love is not limited to those in his fold, it is also the sheep "who do not belong to this fold." The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, for all the sheep, in order to take it up again. God, All that is Love, commands it of all him and of all of us.

Jesus, our Shepherd, leads us toward empathy and compassion, rather than comfort and extraction. It is not enough to be nice, to do the right thing. We are called on to cultivate love deep in our hearts, love in "truth and action." Prayer, where we invoke the name of Jesus, the name that embodies love, Community, where together we follow the call of love, and Scripture, where we hear the voice and follow--lean on these, cultivate love, practice the Golden Rule deep in your heart, and know that it is at the core of being human. It interconnects us all and grows in the fertile ground of the Love of God.