

Faith United Milton, 2018 summer worship series: LOVE STORY

*Compiled by Lorna Turner and provided by the Faith United Milton Worship Team.
July-August 2018*

LOVE is the theme for this summer's worship email series. As Billy Graham once said: "The whole Bible is a love story" – the story of God pursuing a relationship with people. In the New International Version of the Bible, the word "love" appears 319 times in the Old Testament and 232 in the new – the most frequent word in the New Testament.

The word "love" can mean a lot of things. *Psychology Today* describes seven different kinds of love including romantic and family love as well as love for friends, food, objects and activities. The love that the Bible describes is agape love, "a universal love also called charity by Christian thinkers, agape encompasses the modern concept of altruism, and is defined as unselfish concern for the welfare of others."⁽¹⁾

The Apostle John said: "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16), and the whole Bible is the story of God's love for the world and how all people must learn to love God and others in turn. Jesus' two great commandments are recorded in Matthew's gospel: love for God and love for neighbour. (Matthew 22:35-40) The guidelines on how to do that are laid out in the Ten Commandments and John's letters teach us about the basics of faith in Christ. He explains that if people love one another, that is evidence of God's presence in their lives. Jesus said: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

Over the next nine weeks, we will reflect on what love means to us as a Christian community – God's love for us, our love for God, our love for each other, and our love for ourselves. "We will know we are Christians by our love."

(1) Neel Burton M.D. "Hide and Seek" blog posted Jun 25, 2016

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-seek/201606/these-are-the-7-types-love>

July 1 – The greatest of these is LOVE – 1 Corinthians 13

OPENING PRAYER:

As proud as we are of our country, Lord of all, we know it could be better.
We know we could be better. We know that there could be reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples of Canada and better relationships among those of all faiths.
We need your compassion in our communities and in our country.
We need your imagination, your vision of a country and a world transformed.
Instead we have made idols for ourselves of culture, race, status, and material wealth.
We have made gods that are no gods.
Forgive us, Spirit of justice and true peace.
Reconcile, restore, redeem us, Merciful One.
Turn us to the face of Christ and give us your grace, we pray. Amen.

*Written by: **Robin Wardlaw**, Glen Rhodes U.C., Toronto, Ont.
Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.*

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 13 – New International Version

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

REFLECTION: The greatest of these is LOVE

We have heard this passage from 1 Corinthians many times and it is probably the best known description of love that we find in the Bible. In it, Paul argues that LOVE IS AN ACTION, NOT AN EMOTION, therefore, we need to put feet to our love – we need to “walk the talk”. The kind of love Paul talks about is seen, experienced, and demonstrated. We could summarize the first three verses like this: Without love...I say nothing, I am nothing, and I gain nothing.

Love is a word that can only be properly defined in terms of action, attitude, and behaviour. Paul has no room for abstract, theoretical definitions; instead, he wants us to know what love looks like when we see it. Thus, he paints fifteen separate portraits of love. Our contemporary definition of love is that it is an emotion or a feeling—we love our jobs, we love football, we love pizza. In the biblical definition of agape – Christian love – love is an action, not an emotion.

The love of God is our model for agape love. Agape love is a motivation for action that we are free to choose or reject. Agape is a sacrificial love that voluntarily suffers inconvenience, discomfort, and even death for the benefit of another without expecting anything in return. Agape love goes into action when emotionally we aren't feeling all that loving. We are called to agape love through Christ's example: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:1-2).

[Source: adapted from bible.org – the series "Love knows no limits"]

LISTEN / SING:

"Love Never Fails" sung by Brandon Heath
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nQy-aP_Koo

BLESSING:

And now into the care of our everlasting God,
we are placed:
thankful for a love that knows neither
beginning nor ending;
grateful for a hope that gives us courage to live
day by day;
protected and lovingly held in the arms of the Creator of the universe.
May we go out with joy,
sure of our place in the good heart of God.
May we go out to be a blessing
to a world so in need of God's care
that only we can give.

*Written by: **Bob Root**, Peterborough, Ont.*

Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.

July 8 – The essence of LOVE is trust

OPENING PRAYER

How great is God, joy of all the earth!
We notice with our own being:
it is God who makes us secure.
The love of God spreads peace in our hearts
and throughout the world.
Where there is justice, there God is.
Walk throughout the world—
make the rounds of all the marvels,
note the evidence of goodness,
so that we can tell future generations that God will guide us forever.
Come, let us worship God in joy.

*Written by: Suzanne Edgar, Dexter–Port Stanley P.C., Port Stanley, Ont.
Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.*

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 23 – King James Version

We revert to this older and more poetic translation of the Bible for this passage because it is the one we learned as children and it speaks to our hearts.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil;
my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

REFLECTION: The essence of LOVE is trust

The Psalms are filled with affirmations of God's love for us.

In Psalm 23, David writes: "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life." David's word for God's tender affection is a term used in the ancient world to mean love that flows out of deep emotion rather than duty. It's a kind and gentle love. That quaint, old expression "loving-kindness" may still be the best translation of all.

God's nature is to love: sacrificially, selflessly, extravagantly, and beyond our wildest expectations. Psalm 23 tells us what life looks like when it's lived in submission to God's will,

that life lived in a trust relationship with God is abundant and full. It tells us that living in a trust relationship with God is living the way that God would have us live.

In this Psalm, David pondered the meaning of faith. God was very important to David. His love for God (which came second), and God's love for him (which came first), are reflected in every line of this Psalm. David describes God with two different images: first of all, as a shepherd who loves and cares for his sheep; and secondly, as a gracious host who invites guests into his home for protection from their enemies and for a sumptuous meal.

Psalm 23 is very much a Psalm of trust. It is one man's story of how faith in God made life worthwhile. Psalm 23 is a story of difficulties overcome. It reminds us that God never leaves his people or forsakes them. The message of Psalm 23 is the message of God's love. David saw abundant evidence of God's love and grace when he looked back over his life, and he had reason for hope when he looked to the future.

[Sources: www.lifeway.com, <http://lutheran-church-regina.com>]

LISTEN / SING

“The Lord is my shepherd” sung by Stuart Townsend
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MG0>

BLESSING

May the God of David bless and keep us.
May the God of each lost sheep find us.
May the God of the waiting fold protect us.
Now and always. Amen.

*Written by: **Kate Crawford**, Huron Shores U.C., Grand Bend, Ont.
Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.*

July 15 – God’s LOVE for us: sacrificial love

OPENING PRAYER

We come from places of rest, from summer cottages, summer holidays, lazy days of summer, to gather for worship.

As God can be seen in the beauty of creation, the gentle summer breeze that rocks the hammock, and starry nights, so can God be seen in this place.

We come to reconnect. We come to see the face of God in the face of others.

We come seeking, so that God may be known in our lives, in this place, and in the world.

Come, let us worship God.

Let us pray together:

Gracious God, we thank you that you desire to live in relationship with the human family. Bless us as we gather to worship you. Open our hearts and our minds that we may hear again the story of your love for us and for all that you have made. Bless us, heal us, and transform us, so that we might know that we are both loved and cherished and called to be vehicles of your grace in the world. Amen.

*Written by: Allan Warren, St. George U.C., St. George, Ont.
Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.*

SCRIPTURE – New International Version

John 3:16 – For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

1 John 3:16 – This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

REFLECTION: God’s LOVE is a sacrificial love

Why is John 3:16 the Bible verse we learn first as children? Why is it the verse that all Christians recognize as foundational? Why is the shorthand “3:16” understood universally when used in Christian graffiti? Some consider John 3:16 as the theme verse for the entire Bible, telling us of the love God has for us and the extent of that love—so great that he sacrificed his only Son on our behalf.

The Apostle John reports in his gospel that this is the answer that Jesus gave to Nicodemus, the religious leader who came to Christ in the darkness of night to ask some questions, including how could a grown man be born again. It was in response to Nicodemus’ questions about how to be saved that Christ said those words. John repeats this essential message about sacrificial love in 1 John 3:16, and in a later letter to one of the Christian communities he corresponded with.

Sacrificially loving others isn't about doing what we do well or do easily. Sacrificial love comes from outside of our sweet spot. It's giving more than we want to give, more that we have to give. It's doing more than we know how to do, sharing more than we thought we could share. When we reach out generously to serve others we experience true agape love and see a beautiful picture of life as God planned it to be.

[Sources: <http://www.rebeccabender.org>, <https://www.gotquestions.org>, www.christchurchtomsriver.org/resources]

LISTEN / SING

“They Will Know We Are Christians by our Love” sung by Jars of Clay
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CobNWUXb1M>

BLESSING

Go from here and enjoy this summer season:
at home or away, God will be with you.
In good times and challenging times,
God will support us.
As we face our own challenges,
God will steady us.
As we face challenges as a church,
God will work with us.
As we strive to welcome others,
God will call on us to open hands and hearts.
We have confidence, we go in hope,
for God goes with us.

Written by: David Sparks, Summerland, B.C.

Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.

July 22 – LOVE God

OPENING PRAYER

Our God of abundance, infinite in grace,
surrounds us with blessings,
but never overwhelms us with them.
There is enough, always enough,
of what we need.
But it is hidden, tucked beneath the surface,
waiting for us to release it,
if we will act with generosity and grace.
So, we gather to learn anew
our calling as co-creators with God,
whom now we worship. Amen

*Written by: **Rod Sykes**, then at St. Andrew's U.C., Calgary, Alta.
Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.*

SCRIPTURES – New International Version

John 21:17 – The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”
Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?”
He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”
Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

1 John 5: 1-3 – Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands.

REFLECTION: How do we LOVE God?

The words Jesus spoke the night before he died projected into the future and prepared the disciples for his physical departure. We can summarize these last words of Jesus with three thoughts: (1) Obey my teaching; (2) Wait for my Spirit; and (3) Receive my peace.*

Jesus tells us that the person who loves him will keep or preserve everything he has said and taught. Jesus wants us to obey his commandments, and he wants us to preserve the good news of forgiveness and peace with God through faith in his saving work along with everything else that accompanies that good news.

Jesus did not ask Peter if he loved his sheep, but if he loved him. Affection for God's people in itself will not sustain us. His sheep can be unresponsive, unappreciative, and harshly critical of our efforts to love and to serve them. In the end, we will find ourselves defeated and discouraged. The "love of Christ" – our love for him – is the only sufficient motivation that will enable us to stay the course, to continue to feed the flock of God. Thus Jesus asks you and me, "Do you love Me? Feed My sheep."

*[*Sources: Johnold Strey – pastorstrey.wordpress.com, and Our Daily Bread – odb.org/2008/08/14/feed-my-sheep]*

LISTEN / SING

"Feed My Lambs" written and performed by the members of the music ministry at The Church of St. Helen's, Westfield NJ

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pOm1orJ7EQ>

BLESSING

Go now with the guidance and the grace of God.
Let your life portray God's word in human form.
We will show by touch and word
devotion to God, to the earth,
and to all life that comes to birth. Amen.

*Written by: **Robin Wardlaw**, Glen Rhodes U.C., Toronto, Ont.
Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.*

July 29 – LOVE one another

OPENING PRAYER

Great and loving God,
in the beauty of this summer day
may we see your creating spirit
inviting us to share the goodness of life.
You have given us the gift of Sabbath rest
and ask us to notice your goodness all around us,
to share in the celebration of your word
creating and recreating
with each story and in each prayer.
Today may we meet you in our shared wisdom
and longing for understanding
that leads us in the Way of Christ.
Keep us from the deluge of distractions
that lead us on a wild goose chase
when we come seeking you.

*Written by: Wendy MacLean, Christ U.C., Lyn, Ont.
Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.*

SCRIPTURES – New International Version

John 13: 34 – A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

1 John 4:12-13 – No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.

Ephesians 4:2-3 – Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

REFLECTION: LOVE one another – affirming the Christ in ourselves

Love one another ... Love one another ... Love one another
Over and over the commandment is repeated.

In understanding these beautiful passages, it's important to recognize that the "Son of God" is not simply Jesus of Nazareth, it is the Christ, the Presence of God in each of us. In recognizing the Christ in Jesus, we are affirming the same Christ in ourselves: "we abide in him, and he in us." Jesus taught that we can discern the true from the false "by their fruits," and clearly love is the most purely divine fruit of all.

The nature of love is inherent in every statement John makes. "Love one another," he says. Love is not to be only for those who are pleasant to us, or who are nice, congenial, clever people. We are not to love because people are lovable, but because each is another. Each one is a person,

capable of a unique relationship to God, and therefore not a thing to be dealt with impersonally, or to be opposed or accepted as it suits our purpose, but a living, breathing, searching creation of God, just like us.

God's love reaches its ultimate and final conclusion when it becomes visible in us. It is incomplete, and therefore unreachable and incomprehensible, until it finds its manifestation in a living human being, incarnate again in you and me. Here is a world dying for love. The word is on everyone's lips, indicating the vast, surging hunger of the heart. And we are the only channels by which the love the world is searching for can ever be loosed among humanity. Therefore, let us love one another and be known as people who love one another. For, your concern for another, or my concern for another, completes God.

[Sources: Ray Stedman sermons – <https://www.raystedman.org> and www.unity.org]

LISTEN / SING

“Get Together” by the Youngbloods

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53XyCbIJGKY>

BLESSING

Some serve for a moment,

some serve for what seems forever.

Yet together we all serve the hope of the kingdom.

We share in the promise of new life that begins with celebrating something wonderful: we are all loved by God, who has hope that we will love one another as God loves us.

Thanks be to God.

*Written by: **Sandy Ferguson**, Strathearn U.C., Edmonton, Alta.*

Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.

Aug 5 – LOVE our enemies

OPENING PRAYER

Across a vast universe, points of light.
Among a galaxy's hostile stars, a world of warmth.
Amidst the rush and business of a city,
a sanctuary of hope.
A hungry person asks,
and there is an answer.
A hectic city wonders,
and there is a chorus of joyful voices.
A Holy Mystery calls,
and we answer with our worship and our love.

*Written by: **Robin Wardlaw**, Glen Rhodes U.C., Toronto, Ont.
Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.*

SCRIPTURE – New International Version

Luke 6:27-36 – Jesus said: “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

REFLECTION: LOVE your enemies

Jesus believed in mercy, in sacrificial love, and that the least of us is the most. Turning the other cheek is not about pacifism or putting ourselves in danger. It's not about letting another person get away with something... it's about preventing a cycle of revenge and retaliation. Turning the other cheek requires a strength that can only come from God.

Jesus wasn't necessarily talking about a physical confrontation when he explained this to his followers. Instead, he was describing how to respond to insults. He didn't necessarily mean we should allow ourselves to get beaten up or fail to protect ourselves from physical harm. When people hurt us in some way, we often feel shame or anger and that pushes us to lash back out. Jesus was reminding us to set that humiliation and irritation aside so that we don't immediately make things worse.

In the moment, your thoughts probably aren't on why the person is hurting you. This is why it's important to think about these types of things now and make them part of you.

A person who lashes out often has a lot of pain inside of them. They think less of themselves, so they insult and harm others. They are trying to make themselves feel better. That doesn't make what they're doing right, but having an understanding that the aggressor is a person too, will help you make better decisions in the moment.

Bullying is a serious situation, but we have to be smart and spiritual in our responses. Turning the other cheek does not mean that we just take an insult and walk away, but that we have spiritual strength to make good decisions about it. Responding with dignity opens the door of respect. It is God we have to please in this situation; it is God's opinion that matters. It's hard, because no one likes to be disrespected, but showing dignity in trying times is the only way to break a dysfunctional cycle. It is the only way to create real change in the world. It is the only way to break down barriers.

When Jesus was on the cross, he forgave those who placed him up there to die. It would have been easy for him to hate his aggressors. Yet he forgave them. He died on the cross with dignity. When we act dignified in undignified moments of our lives, we earn the respect of others, and they see a reflection of God in our actions.

[Source: adapted from "What it Means to Turn the Other Cheek" by Kelli Mahoney. ThoughtCo, Mar. 14, 2018, [[thoughtco.com/what-it-means-to-turn-the-other-cheek-712419](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-it-means-to-turn-the-other-cheek-712419).]

LISTEN / SING

"You got to turn the other cheek" sung by Bill Jolliff, Jacob Henry and Bluegrass Gospel
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSIEdVn8apg>

BLESSING

In all our rainbow spectrum of diversity
send us out, O Christ,
to live your symphony of richness,
teaching others the melodies
of your self-giving.

In all our tentative approaches to challenge,
send us out, O Spirit,
to listen for your direction,
proclaiming the Good News
with living dynamics.

In all our disbelief that you, O God, embrace us,
send us out to live within the stuff of life,
that we may find the courage
to perform daring acts of love.

*Written by: **Gord Dunbar**, Kincardine P.C., Kincardine, Ont.
Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.*

Aug 12 – LOVE yourself

OPENING PRAYER

Christ, you lived with trust and vitality
all of your days.
Not forfeiting the wisdom, the healing strength,
or depth of your compassion,
you cultivated a bond to life
and lived from a desire that drew you along without fatigue or despair.
Teach us, we who can become so ingrained in predictable patterns,
to pray for sacred creativity, compassion, community, time, and space.
Be in our worship life, and we shall open to your playful work in us.
Lead us into strength, and we will embrace every day with your assurance in us.
Praying in the name of the Boundless Christ,
we make room for this day's gift.

*Written by: Daryl Webber, Lowville Nelson United Ministries, Burlington, Ont.
Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.*

SCRIPTURE – New International Version

Genesis 1:26 – Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

Psalms 139:14 – I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

Romans 9:20 – But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?”

Ephesians 2:10 – For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 5:29-30 – After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church, for we are members of his body.

REFLECTION: Take time to LOVE yourself

When Jesus talked about the greatest commandment of all, he quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and said we are to love God with all our heart. But he also added the second greatest commandment: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Mark 12:31). There's something important here that people often miss: we must love ourselves too – that is foundational to loving others. And 1 Corinthians 13 tells us what love acts like. It is patient, kind, and accepting.

That's how we should love ourselves – by being patient, kind and accepting. We should forgive and forget the past rather than beating ourselves over the head with our failures and mistakes. We understand we are to forgive others, and so we must forgive ourselves as God forgives us.

Loving yourself also means taking care of yourself. Keep your self-talk positive. Eat well, take care of your health, and create a pleasing home for yourself. Invest in your emotional and intellectual well-being.

Loving yourself means accepting yourself as you are – because God made you. God loves you right now. Because you are good enough for God to love, then you are good enough for you to love. Your standards should not be higher than God's.

“For only when we are truly aligned with our own beautiful and unique spirit, can we completely and authentically give and receive real love. This is because when we love ourselves we know that we can give without becoming resentful, exhausted and depleted, and we can receive because we know we deserve it. Self-love is the prerequisite for complete immersion in the abundant flow of light and love in the world around us.”*

[Sources: *Joyce Meyer Ministries – www.joycemeyer.org; <http://www.adevotion.org/>; Joyce Marter – www.huffingtonpost.com]

LISTEN / SING

“Through My Father’s Eyes” sung by Holly Starr
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldiEOAtTKU>

BLESSING

Go now with the guidance and the grace of God.
Let your life portray God’s word in human form.
We will show by touch and word
devotion to God, to the earth,
and to all life that comes to birth. Amen.

Written by: Robin Wardlaw, Glen Rhodes U.C., Toronto, Ont.

Aug 19 – The greatest commandments – Faith United Milton’s foundation statement

OPENING PRAYER

Creator God, beauty is all around us, in your creation, in your handiwork, in the people that you have created and gifted. As we pause now to consider you and what you are asking of us at this time, open our minds to notice that beauty, especially in the places and people that seem to portray anything but beauty. May we use our time and God-given gifts to create beauty, in our words, in our actions, and in our very being. Amen.

*Written by: Catherine Tovell, Delaware-Kilworth P.C., Komoka, Ont.
Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.*

SCRIPTURE – New International Version

Matthew 22:36-40 – “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

REFLECTION: Showing our LOVE

A religious leader once asked Jesus about greatness: “Which is the great commandment?” (Matt. 22:36). Jesus responded by challenging that leader to love – love God and love others. Whatever else our faith in Christ compels us to do, there is nothing greater we can do than to show our love – for love reveals the heart of God. After all, “God is love” (1John 4:8). It’s easy to be sidetracked by lesser things, but our focus must remain on the greatest thing – loving our God. That in turn enables us to love our neighbours as ourselves. This scripture from Matthew is central to our Christian faith and the foundation upon which Faith United Milton is built.

So, let’s start with the “love ourselves” part: how do we love ourselves? Well, for starters, we’re always thinking about ourselves. We think about what we’re going to eat for breakfast, what we need to do at work, what we need to pick up from the store on the way home. Basically, our thoughts and our day are centered on ourselves. So when Jesus tells us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, that’s a tall order. He’s saying we need to think about others as much as we think about ourselves. He means seeking the happiness, goodness, peace, and security of others as much as we seek those things in our own lives.

How can we do this, especially to those who annoy us, hurt us, or perhaps even persecute us? When we think about loving our neighbors sacrificially, as a priority number one, it seems impossible. Most of us can’t even say we do this fully for the people we love most. But then we remember the first part of Jesus’ command: “Love God with all your heart, soul and mind.” There’s our answer. When we focus all our love toward God, he takes our selfish heart and transforms it into a heart capable of loving others. We no longer need others to validate us, be kind or loving toward us in order to love them back. Christ’s love is enough. He fills us up so we can pour out selfless love to others.

[Sources: Our Daily Bread – odb.org; www.harvest.org; and Kelly Givens – www.crosswalk.com]

LISTEN / SING

“How Great Thou Art” sung by The Tenors

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nZc5SnIAp0>

BLESSING

God in Jesus the Christ calls you
even above the roar of the storm,
“Reach out to your neighbour,
do justice, love kindness,
and together, walk humbly with your God.”

*Written by: **George Allan**, Chatham, Ont.*

Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.

Aug 26 – Agape LOVE (Summer series conclusion)

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, in the rest and renewal of summertime, we worship with our community of faith. We praise you for the sights and sounds of creation that remind us of your wonder and delight. May this time together fill us with delight so that our spirits may dance the sacred story and our lips whisper joyful possibilities. All praise and glory is yours. Amen.

*Written by: Laura Turnbull, Penticton U.C., Penticton, B.C.
Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.*

SCRIPTURE – English Standard Version

John 13:34-35 – A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

1 John 3:16 – By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

REFLECTION: Agape LOVE is active

Agape love is not a feeling, it's a motivation for action that we are free to choose or reject. Agape is a sacrificial love that voluntarily suffers inconvenience, discomfort, and even death for the benefit of another without expecting anything in return. We are called to agape love through Christ's example: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:1-2).

The Greek word agape is often translated as "love" in the New Testament, but how is "agape love" different from other types of love? The essence of agape love is goodwill, benevolence, and willful delight in the object of love.

Unlike our English word love, agape is not used in the New Testament to refer to romantic or sexual love. Nor does it refer to close friendship or brotherly love, for which the Greek word philia is used. Agape love involves faithfulness, commitment, and an act of the will. It is distinguished from the other types of love by its lofty moral nature and strong character. Agape love is beautifully described in 1 Corinthians 13.

One important aspect of agape love is that it extends beyond emotions. It's much more than a feeling or sentiment. Agape love is active. It demonstrates love through actions.

Jesus told his followers to love one another in the same way sacrificial way he loved them. This command was new because it demanded a new kind of love, a love like his own: agape love.

What would be the outcome of this kind of love? People would be able to recognize them as Jesus' disciples because of their mutual love.

[Source: "The Fourth Love" by Dr. Keith P. Wells. 2018. <https://www.cantodeo.org/the-fourth-love>]

LISTEN / SING

“Amazing Grace / My Chains Are Gone” sung by Chris Tomlin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoeBFZes3ts>

BLESSING

Return to the world in which we live,
giving thanks to God for your many blessings,
and sharing those blessings with your neighbour,
all for the love of God. Amen.

*Written by: **George Allan**, Chatham, Ont.*

Gathering, PENTECOST 1 2018. Used with permission.