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“Instructions On How To Love” The Rev. Kara Leslie  
(10/29/2023, Twenty-Second after Pentecost)

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Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable unto you, O Lord, and the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

Jesus gives us instructions on how to love. Who to love? Love God, self and others? How to love with your whole heart, your mind and your soul? Why to love? It's a commandment from God, when all the time, where, everywhere. Loving is one of the most beautiful and wonderful things about life. It's beautiful to give and it's beautiful to receive. Jesus in his conversation with the Pharisees is trying to tell them how to love better. It is clear they know the law, they love the law, but Jesus is saying it's much simpler than that. Even our passage in Leviticus says that the Lord speaks to Moses and tells him to tell the people of Israel, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. So this morning, I want to share a few things with you about how to love better. We all want to love and how do we love better. First, try not to get bogged down in the stuff that doesn't matter.

The Pharisees are lost. For many chapters now, these men have been plotting trying to trick Jesus into answering a question the wrong way or confuse him or watch him fail. They're so locked down in their trickery, they are unable to see what Jesus is inviting them into.

The Pharisees and Sadducees have this little private meeting, private discussion. How can we test Jesus this time? And one of the Pharisees says, I'm a lawyer, I'm going to go test him. I've got the perfect question. So the Pharisee goes up to Jesus and says, which

commandment is most important? Jesus responds to this man and tells him, you shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your soul. This is the greatest and first commandment and the second is like unto it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus directly answers their question. Everything else rests on these two commandments.

I suspect the Pharisees were hoping that Jesus would get lost into a long explanation of all the Jewish rules that they were following. They wanted a long conversation that would take time, that would provide other opportunities for tricky questions and watching Jesus fail or stumble or change his mind. It's like when you ask a question to one of the older people in your family and for some of us, that is us. And when we ask that question and when the answer is long, confusing and repetitive, sometimes that isn't helpful. Or if you ask the young environmental activist in your family who's looking for the recycling bin and you don't have one, you might get a very, very long answer. Now I'm all for recycling and I love long stories, but sometimes it's important to keep it short and get to the main point.

When Jesus offers it, the Pharisees are upset because they needed and wanted something much longer.

So how to love better. Are we getting stuck in the stuff that doesn't matter?

And the tangible things and the stuff and the emotional heaviness of life. Maybe in those tapes of unyour unworthiness keep playing over and over. Maybe there's triangles. They're just dragging you down. Or we could be busy over functioning and our busy over functioning lives.

How to love better calls us to simplify and focus on the main thing. Loving God, loving neighbor and loving self. Second, to love better, you need boundaries.

If boundaries are about respect, loving is Christian invites us to have these boundaries.

If you have or have ever had someone in your life that has an addiction,

then you know or you are learning how to live with boundaries.

Maybe you've gone to an alanon meeting or seeking a counselor.

When we love an addict, we have to be very clear that we love the person,

but we don't love their behavior. Beside my desk, my kitchen table, I have a phrase on a sticky note

that says, we do not cause it. We cannot control it. We cannot cure

it.

Loving another, even ourselves, requires boundaries.

We need to ask questions like, does loving this person include respect for myself?

I know God loves them, but for me, loving them is killing me. Do I want revenge or can I just let this go? How is loving this person inviting you to be more realistic about your boundaries?

Acknowledging the need and the importance of boundaries is part of our journey on how to love better.

Third, to love Jesus better, to love others better, to love ourselves better is often times

very hard. You ask any couple that's been married a short time or a long time,

they will tell you there are many days that were very tough. There was grace upon grace upon grace.

Hard decisions had to be made, listening and caring, but most of them they would do it all over again.

If you're taking care of aging parents, then you too know that loving is often times different

and hard, much different and much harder than we expect. Recently, I rewatched this video where there's

this mom and her daughter and the mom is probably in her 80s and her hair is beautiful and white

and thin and put up on her head and she's laying down on her pillow and her daughter pulls up

is laying there also on the pillow. The daughter's middle age and she is having a conversation with

her mother and she says, how are you doing today, mama? And the older woman obviously has some

form of dementia, cognitive issues. Am I your mama? Yes, you're my mama. Oh, well I'm doing okay,

how are you today? And the girl says, the young woman says, I'm doing okay. I love you mama.

And the mama stops and looks at her daughter in long pause and says, I love you too.

Kelly. This mother had mentioned her daughter's name in so long and Kelly looked at her mother and

said, I am Kelly. I am your daughter. And the mom said, well, of course you're my daughter. I love

you Kelly. Love is hard at different stages in our lives. And we have to be honest and open

about that. If we are to love better. Finally, loving better is something we do not do alone.

There is lots that happen yesterday, rain, which was beautiful, and there was a football game.

And I know there was lots of things going on and I probably should have been paying attention,

but the only thing I can take away from that game is a woman who was walking. She had a black

t-shirt on and her shirt said, love, you can't do it alone. That was my take away from that gang.  
We are found in the love of God and Jesus Christ our Savior and through the Holy Spirit.  
We know how to love because God first loved us. We are created in the image of God and God's holiness and fullness is what we grow into in this life. This week, the clergy were at a conference at Camp Allen. Once a year, I guess we all go down. This is my first time to ever go and wonderful speakers, good lectures, tons and tons and tons of food. So much food, but the best part, the best part of the whole conference was the last five minutes. Our bishop, Andy Doyle, God up, and he spoke about himself and the church. And one of the deacons earlier in the week had asked him, what was your most favorite part of your job? What is the best part of your work? And Andy took a moment and he looked out at the people and he said with incredible vulnerability and immense amount of emotion and a beautiful invitation. And he said, the most important part of my job is loving God and loving you, shepherding the sheep of God's pasture. I was deeply moved by how loving that was and is. We cannot love better by ourselves.  
So if you are trying to love better, that kind of love is shown on the cross and in the empty tomb and beside you and me every day. It shows us how to love better. We don't have to get bogged down in the stuff of life because Jesus has set us free. Jesus has given us the strength to set firm boundaries with those we care for. And no matter how hard it gets, we are not alone in loving better. So if you, and I hope we all are, are trying to love better, no you are not doing it by yourself. God is with you. In St. Albans is with you. We are praying for you every day. We feed you in the sacraments with his grace, with word and music. And we are loving you better, all of you because of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.