

Meditation for the Second Vespers in Advent

'I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice, and my pleas for mercy.'

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We say these words so often, we Lutherans, 'fear, love, and trust.' These are the things we owe God. These are how we rightly relate to our Lord. These three together are Christian piety. And *the greatest of these is love.*

The Pharisees gather to test our Lord. They ask Him which is *the greatest of the commandments.* Our

Lord responds, *'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'*

How could He have answered otherwise? He is God. And *God is love.*

People often ponder the ineffable Trinity. That there are three persons, who are yet still one. They think this a great mystery, and insofar as we humans cannot understand it, it remains a great mystery. But it is not so hard to understand, for *God is love.*

Love is nothing else than to see another as not another. To look upon someone else, and be able to say 'There I am.' To look upon another's suffering, and suffer in them. To see another's joy, and rejoice in them. To live in them as they live. To die with them when they die.

When our friend lives, as long as he lives, we are bound by the tightest bonds of affection. This we call happiness. When he dies, we are torn from ourselves, for part of ourselves died in him. This we call sorrow.

But whether sorrow or affection, these are both the fruit of love, for love

breaks down all division between 'You' and 'I'. There is no you and I in love. The two become one being in two persons, living a life together, as friends, as spouses, as children.

God is love, and so the Trinity is not so hard to understand, for it is but one being in three persons, united by love, from all eternity, unto all timelessness.

From *the foundation of the world*, our God has desired to live in such love, such unity, with we, His image, which He created in infinite joy at the beginning of time, that we might be what Christ called His disciples when He spoke to them on the day before His Passion, saying '*Ye are my friends.*'

Yet we wandered from Him. He loved us, yet we did not love Him. So far away we lost ourselves. But God *so loved the world*, that He would not have a part of Himself be lost. He would not let His very image be torn away.

So He travelled into this wilderness, this hateful world, and even assumed our form, becoming man, for *God is love*, and love unites; and in the incarnation, God and man are forever made one.

He is one with us in all our misery. He is one with us in all our pain. He is one with us in all our anguish. For this reason, the prophet calls Him *a man of sorrows*. How could He not be? Our Lord is united with us in Christ, united with a humanity of sorrows, endless and infinite, yet this, our suffering, He *counts even as joy*, for to our God, taking on the iniquity of all mankind is a small cost to pay to regain His love, His friends, His people, the shattered image of Himself. Because He looked upon our fallen race, and said 'There I am.'

This is the meaning of the *crèche*, the little nativity sets we put up in our houses or on our lawns: that God would not allow us to be far off from Him. That in His love for us, He must draw near.

He saw us, and came down to be with us, to suffer with us, to die for us; that we might see him, suffer for Him, die in Him, and so forever be with him. For *God abides in us, and we in Him*.

*So we love God, for he
first loved us.*

Therefore, we are commanded to *love the Lord with all our heart and soul and mind*. Indeed, this is *'the greatest and first commandment.'*

For to love Him is nothing other than to be loved by Him, to receive His unending mercy, and so be made one with Him by His incarnation, by His uniting Himself to our life of sorrow.

And being united to Christ in love, we are united to all that is Christ's, His compassion, His pain, His suffering, His death, His Resurrection, His eternal life, His heavenly throne.

Indeed, He was born a child *without help* that He might endure all the heart break of our lives, so that we would be with Him forever, His friends, His people. That our dying would be the beginning of our everlasting life with Him, the Joy of Man's Desiring, the Lover of our Souls.

Therefore it is written:

*'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the
death of his saints.'*

'What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?'

'I love the Lord, for you have delivered my eyes from tears.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Meditation Texts:

Psalms 116; 1 John 4:7-21; Matthew 22:34-40.