



# Love Is Not the Only Thing

*TEXT*  
*Mark 12:28-34*

May 13, 2018 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

**O**f all the people that Jesus talks with in Mark's gospel, this scribe is the only person Jesus says is not far from the kingdom. Why is that?

He asks, "What is the most important commandment?" What he is asking is, "Jesus, what do *you* want for me and for the world? What do you want for me and from me?"

Jesus says, "I want you to love God with all that you are and love your neighbor as yourself."

It may surprise you to know that this is the only conversation in Mark's gospel that references love. Nowhere else is love talked about. But in every verse, love is lived. I think that's the message. What God wants for us is to live love. As Clint Black used to sing, "Love is something that we do."

If you are fortunate, you have known someone in your life who has shown you what love looks like.

Jesus says the first commandment is to love. The scribe says, "That's right." Can't you imagine the relief of our Lord as Savior! Whew! But the scribe adds this: "Love is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices." Have you made a burnt offering recently? I'm not

talking about breakfast in bed for your mother.

I can't tell you how many times I have heard folks refer to this space up here as the *altar*. Have you ever called it that? We actually don't call it that; it's a *chancel*. An altar is a place of animal sacrifice. It was common in ancient Israel, but I'll tell you the truth: I can't remember the last time we had an animal sacrifice here in the sanctuary.

In the scribe's world, sacrifices were worship. The scribe is saying, "Love is even more important than worship." But here's the thing: He doesn't say we don't need to worship anymore. He's saying love is what worship is for. Love is not the only thing; love is the first thing, the thing that shapes everything else.

That's important. Love doesn't live by itself. Love shows up in all the other important things in our lives. That's why it's so hard.

My friend Tom Long once saw a man carrying his wife across the threshold. Tom was driving by when he glimpsed this homecoming, maybe from a wedding. At first glance, it looked like they were taking a cheerful step. The man was happily carrying his wife across the threshold. But the traffic stopped,

and Tom had a longer look. They were both graying, much older than he first thought. And then Tom saw the wheelchair, from which the man had just lifted her. This wasn't a first easy step across the threshold. It was perhaps the thousandth hard step.<sup>1</sup>

For some, such a deed might just be a job, but I imagine love was involved, so it was the only thing he could do. Love is something that we do. If you commit your heart to love, if you commit your life to love, sooner or later it's going to take all you have to offer.

This is the day we give thanks for our moms; a day when we honor moms. It is also a day when we pray for those in this sanctuary who are grieving the loss of their moms and facing a new kind of adulthood that is lonelier. And a day when, and I am very mindful of this, we pray for those in our midst who want to be a mom and life has not made that possible for one reason or another.

As every Mother's Day, we celebrate baptism. We will baptize into this church family 21 children in our various services today. When we bring our children for baptism, we are saying we will raise these children in the church because these children,

like all children, will need a community to show them what love looks like.

I will be bold and say that happens among you all the time. Interestingly, as it happens this way every year, this is also that season when so many in our church family are experiencing graduations.

And this is the mystery. Some of these parents can barely make it through the day because they are sleep deprived. It's inexplicable how caring for a 12-pound human being can leave you exhausted all the time. And you wonder if you can actually survive until Tuesday, because Tuesday is a long time from now. But then the oddest things happen. That "12 pounds" turns around and has traded her pacifier for a graduation gown, and you don't know how it happened so fast.

If you are fortunate, your mother was one who loved you along that journey. You can thank her for that today. And today is a day that your mother pretends that it was all easy.

If the thing that Jesus wants from us is love, that means in our families love is what defines us. And it means in the church family we are not defined by a collection of mission projects or even a collection of confessions. The church is first a network of relationships — often growing, always challenged, frequently dysfunctional — and amazingly, the place that love is shared and grace is experienced. The church is the place where holy friendship is practiced.

In my Friday "enote," I shared with you my favorite Mother's Day poem by Billy Collins, *The Lanyard*. Today I want to share with you my favorite Mother's Day children's book.

*A<sup>2</sup> mother held her new baby and very slowly rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And while she held him, she sang:*

*I'll love you forever,  
I'll like you for always,  
As long as I'm living  
my baby you'll be.*

*The baby grew. He grew and he grew and he grew. He grew until he was two years old, and he ran all around the house. He pulled all the books off the shelves. He pulled all the food out of the refrigerator and he took his mother's watch and flushed it down the toilet. Sometimes his mother would say, "This kid is driving me CRAZY!"*

*But at night time, when that two-year-old was quiet, she opened the door to his room, crawled across the floor, looked up over the side of his bed; and if he was really asleep she picked him up and rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. While she rocked him she sang:*

*I'll love you forever,  
I'll like you for always,  
As long as I'm living  
my baby you'll be.*

*The little boy grew. He grew and he grew and he grew. He grew until he was nine years old. And he never wanted to come in for dinner, he never wanted to take a bath, and when grandma visited he always said bad words.*

*Sometimes his mother wanted to sell him to the zoo!*

*But at night time, when he was asleep, the mother quietly opened the door to his room, crawled across the floor and looked up over the side of the bed. If he was really asleep, she picked up that nine-year-old boy and rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And while she rocked him she sang:*

*I'll love you forever,  
I'll like you for always,  
As long as I'm living  
my baby you'll be.*

*The boy grew. He grew and he grew and he grew. He grew until he was a teenager. He had strange friends and he wore strange clothes and he listened to strange music. Sometimes the mother felt like she was in a zoo!*

*But at night time, when that teenager was asleep, the mother opened the door to his room, crawled across the floor and looked up over the side of the bed. If he was really asleep she picked up that great big boy and rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. While she rocked him she sang:*

*I'll love you forever,  
I'll like you for always,  
As long as I'm living  
my baby you'll be.*

*That teenager grew. He grew and he grew and he grew. He grew until he was a grown-up man. He left home and got a house across town. But sometimes on dark nights the mother got into her car and drove across town. If all the lights in her son's house were out, she opened his bedroom window, crawled across*

*the floor, and looked up over the side of his bed. If that great big man was really asleep she picked him up and rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And while she rocked him she sang:*

*I'll love you forever,  
I'll like you for always,  
As long as I'm living  
my baby you'll be.*

*Well, that mother, she got older. She got older and older and older. One day she called up her son and said, "You'd better come see me because I'm very old and sick." So her son came to see her. When he came in the door she tried to sing the song. She sang:*

*I'll love you forever,  
I'll like you for always...*

*But she couldn't finish because she was too old and sick. The son went to his mother. He picked her up and rocked her back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And he sang this song:*

*I'll love you forever,  
I'll like you for always,  
As long as I'm living  
my Mommy you'll be.*

*When the son came home that night, he stood for a long time at the top of the stairs. Then he went into the room where his very new baby daughter was sleeping. He picked her up in his arms and very slowly rocked her back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And while he rocked her he sang:*

*I'll love you forever,  
I'll like you for always,  
As long as I'm living  
my baby you'll be.*

The scribe came to Jesus and said, "I want to know what you

want for me and what you want from me."

Jesus said, "I want you to love, because in the end that is what you are for." This is the only time that Jesus talked about love. But in every moment he lived love, because love is something that we do.

If you are fortunate, you had someone who showed you what love looks like when it is lived, maybe your mother. But even if not, you are here and God has chosen to be in this place with you. And God, like a holy mother, will love you forever.

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Chandler Stokes who shared this story in his sermon preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids, MI. "Imagination & Love," October 30, 2016.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Munsch, *Love You Forever* (1986)

**This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.**

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.