

I. Once upon a time, ...

A. Long, long ago, back in the days of ol', back in the days of Jesus Freaks, like many teenagers, I had posters covering my bedroom wall, in some cases to hide the damage I had done to the wall, that my father later learned of when I moved out, but that takes us from my point.

One of the posters I had on the wall bore a simple phrase that probably changed my life and made it possible for me to continue in my faith.

That poster simply said, "Love is a verb."

B. "Love is a verb."

1. It was a nice teenage sentiment, especially at a time in life when love was often measured in one's progress around the baseball diamond with your girl friend.

2. It was a reminder that love was more than attraction, or lust, or hormones; even more than just liking someone a lot.

3. It was a realization that love what not some **THING** that I got, or gave; love was not a **NOUN**.
Love was an action, a process, a verb.

4. But for me, as I said, it was even more; it was something that changed my faith, my religious vision.
5. You see back in Jr. High I had already gone through my religious rebellion stage when I decided that church was a horrible waste of a Sunday morning and that God was pretty meaningless.
6. I had pretty much rejected the anthropomorphic projections of God that I had learned in Sunday School and that most of my Jesus Freak friends still unquestioningly worshipped.
7. But I also had the deeper internal sense that God was real; I just couldn't get a handle on it.
8. Well, that poster, that simple phrase, "Love is a verb," gave me one of my first handles and allowed me to stretch my religious vision and have some sense of God that was real, yet very different from the failed anthropomorphic projections I had learned in Sunday School.
9. It all fit nicely into a simple logical syllogism.

C. You remember about logical syllogisms.

1. Like $A=B, B=C \therefore A=C$

2. Or, in word form;
Mortals die.
Socrates is mortal.
Therefore Socrates will die.
3. Well, that poster gave me the first phrase in my syllogism;
Love is a verb.
4. The second phrase of the syllogism was from a scripture – that many of you can probably guess at this point.
That second phrase was simply,
“God is love.”
5. It all made sense now.
Love is a verb.
God is love.
Therefore, God is a verb.
6. God was not a thing, a noun, an object;
God was an action, a process.
You can’t hold “run” in your hand.
You can’t hold “cry” in your hand.
But they are real.
You can’t hold “love” in your hand, but it’s real.
You can’t hold God in your hand, but God is real.

D. Now this was not the end of my theological investigation, but rather a new beginning. It was a new beginning to my growing curiosity about God and the loving relationship I had with God;

it was rather like a wormhole into another universe of possibility for understanding God.

It simply allowed me to break out of the box that I had been told God lived in; but where I couldn't find God.

- E. While my understanding of God has continued to evolve, the understanding that God is a verb is still meaningful to me and I think it can be helpful to others who may be having issues with their current image of God but still wish to deepen their understanding and relationship with God.

II. So what does this mean to us in our religious life?

- A. Stephen J. Patterson, who was Professor of NT at Eden Theological Seminary, a UCC Seminary, describes the "basic reality" of God as love. He says, for "to love God is to love love itself." (Patterson, *The God of Jesus: The Historical Jesus and the Search for Meaning*)

- B. He goes on to say, "That is why Jesus embodied love in his own life in a more radical way than the simple love of neighbor might suggest. He loved prostitutes. He loved sinners, traitors, tax collectors.

He treated the shamed with honor and
 declared the unclean clean.
 He loved the unlovable.
 He loved his enemies.
 To love God is to be devoted to a basic and
 fundamental reality that runs through all of
 life and creation." [Patterson]

- C. To love God is to love 'love';
 it is to love the process by which meaning
 and value are brought into reality.
- D. When we're trying to figure out the meaning
 of life, when we're trying to make sense of
 everything,
 Patterson points us toward this
 "reality that can give life its richness and
 ultimate meaning."
 "This is the reality," he says, "that beckons
 us to live better than we live.
 This is the reality that exists as already
 present, an Empire 'within you,' that can be
 as powerful in the shaping of human life and
 relationships as we want it to be." (Patterson)
- E. "An Empire 'within you,' that can be as
 powerful in shaping of human life and
 relationships as we want it to be."
 And Jesus it appears wanted the Empire
 within him to be very powerful.

- F. As Shaun White is the embodiment of snowboarding and Usain Bolt is the embodiment of running;
Jesus was even more so the embodiment of Love.
 - G. Jesus embodied the process and reality of love that gives life its richness and ultimate meaning.
 - H. Jesus loved love so much that he became the earthly manifestation of love itself.
 - I. And to follow Jesus is why we are here this morning.
We are here to increase our love of love.
 - 1. To love love is to worship God.
 - 2. We are here this morning for the love of God.
- III. Now the scary thing for us is that we too are called to embody love, the reality that gives life its richness and ultimate meaning.
- A. We are not only to love 'love', which is the fulfillment of the great commandment that calls us to love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; we are also to love one another; which is really the hard one.

- B. This is second part of the commandment is what takes us from loving humanity and creation in general, to loving specific instances of humanity and creation.
- C. This is where it comes down to trying to figure how to best relate to an overbearing mother-in-law, or a rebellious 5 year old child or 15 year old teenager, or the hard headed parent, or the guy on the corner begging for money, or the politician who wants to destroy the world you want to see, or the boss who degrades you and the co-worker who treats you like dung and -- let's not even begin to enter into the realm of spousal relations.
- D. No – come on let's be brave – let's do this.
1. I mean as far as scripture tells us, not even Jesus dared enter the valley of the shadow of the holy union.
 2. But it is right there in that single primary relationship that we get our best opportunity to learn how to love.
 3. Clearly, it is when the honeymoon is over that real love begins.
 4. In the best of times it is a fulfilling relationship that reveals the glory of God's realm.

5. In the worst of times it is the draining nightmare of loving your enemy.
6. But it is in that relationship that you get your best and most intimate opportunity to love one another.
7. Now let's be realistic here and acknowledge what any good scientist will tell you – you can learn as much, if not more, from a failed experiment as you can from a successful one.
8. Relationships rarely go as intended – life happens – and sometimes love is best served by moving beyond a relationship – but even then the real challenge is how to bring love into the process of dis-engagement.
9. When I was doing post-graduate work at Claremont Graduate School, one of the doctoral candidates was doing his doctorate on the process of dis-engagement.
We often think of love as the process of engagement, people coming together; but love is also what is needed at the foundation of dis-engagement whether it is the dis-engagement of a primary relationship, or the grieving dis-engagement that is forced upon us through death or sickness, or the dis-engagement that comes as our children grow up.
10. My point is that love needs to be the guiding process in all our relationships in whatever stage they are in.

IV. As disciples of Jesus, we too are called to become an incarnation, an embodiment of Love.

A. To love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, is to love Love as your ultimate concern in life.

1. It is to be fully and totally committed to Love.
2. But more it is to be fully and totally committed to loving every one you meet, in every moment of life with all of the beauty and ugliness, pleasure and pain, certainty and ambiguity that life brings.

B. That is what Jesus did.

1. This is what we are called to do.
2. This is how we become incarnations of Love.

C. In closing, let us return to the words of scripture found in 1 John:

**Whoever does not love does not know God,
for God is love.**

**No one has ever seen God;
if we love one another, God lives in us, and
God's love is perfected in us.**

**So we have known and believe the love that
God has for us.**

God is love, and those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. [1 John 4:8, 12, 16]

AMEN.