

Date: June 21, 2026 (Pentecost 4)

1. Texts: Genesis 21:8-21; Ps. 86:1-10, 16-17; Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-38.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: love God, love others.
4. Aim: encourage.
5. Proposition: "Loving God does not mean you love others less."

THE UNCOMPETITIVE LOVE FOR GOD

In the musical, "The Sound of Music", there is a pivotal scene between Maria and the mother abbess. Maria has fled back to the abbey to hide from her growing feelings for Captain von Trapp. At a crucial point, the abbess delivers an important line, which I would now like to paraphrase in light of today's reading from Matthew:

Loving God does not mean you love others any less.

This truth is perhaps even more crucial for us than the original statement was to Maria, especially as we think about Jesus' words.

Whoever loves father or mother more than [he loves] me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than [he loves] me is not worthy of me...¹

The truth in the quote is intensified when we hear the rest of Jesus' words.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

The paraphrase of the abbess' line calms us as we think about loving God and others: "Loving God does not mean you love others any less."

That we are to love God **AND** love others is abundantly clear.

[Jesus] said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it:

¹ Matthew 10:37.

‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.²

Jesus especially emphasized the command to love others.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you... I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.³

Our love is to be of a “both-and” quality. We are to love God with all that we are, while we love others sacrificially. Here’s how we have to think about all this.

Loving others is not a competition. We do not have a limited quantity of love. Loving one person does not steal love from another person. Such a competitive and limiting view of love forces us to rank love, making one person more deserving of our limited ability to love. That is wrong.

In addition, our love for God is of a different character than our love for other people. We choose to love God, even though we can only know him by faith. We choose to love others and can make that love tangible in the hope of being loved in return. The love of God and the love of others are different in character and expression.

So, we can love God *and* love others at the same time. That means we can actually follow the commands of Christ to do so.

What are we to do, then, with

Whoever loves father or mother more than [he loves] me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than [he loves] me is not worthy of me...⁴

² Matthew 22:37-40.

³ John 15:12, 17.

⁴ Matthew 10:37.

Since Jesus both commands us to love God and others, and yet won't allow our love for others to compete with our love for God, we have to figure out how to deal with the apparent ranking of love.

But, it's not really about one love being better or more in quantity than another. It is all about setting our priorities in expressing our love for God and for others. Jesus is saying that we cannot allow our expressions of love for people to take precedence over our love for God. Loving God and expressing that in word and deed should take precedence over loving others and its expressions.

In addition, our love for God does not require the same expressions as our love for other people. God has no physical needs which require our attention. God is not wounded by our acts of emotional neglect.

In essence, Jesus was saying, "Put the love of God first, because that will place your other loves in the proper perspective." The command to love God with all that we are takes precedence over the command to love others because this priority will enable us to better love others.

But—and this is a big but—loving God first will bring you into conflict with the world that values sentimental attachment and operates on the assumption that we have limited capacity to love. I can't tell you how many mothers have said to me, "My children mean everything to me." With that truth, the fathers are shunted off to the side. So, when the world hears that you love God first, they will assume that you can't love even your own family.

This is the point at which we have to remind ourselves of the mother abbess.

Loving God does not mean you love others any less.

The loves do not compete. They operate in different realms. We only rank them in priority so that we may actually love others as they should be loved. Loving God as Creator means that we won't idolize other people. Loving God as our Saviour means that we can more effectively love others in ways that draw them to salvation. Loving God with all that we are means that we will better express our love for others.

Our love for God does not compete with our love for others. We do not have a limited quantity of love or a limited capacity to love. What we do have is a limited amount of emotional and spiritual energy to express our love in word and deed. That's why we must place God's love first. In so doing, we also place our other loves in their proper place in our universe.

Loving God does not mean we will love others less. It does mean that our love for others will play its proper role in our lives. Ultimately, loving God and then loving others will fulfill our own creation in the image of God.

Who knew that "The Sound of Music" could lead us towards this fundamental application of the gospel?

AMEN.