

From the time we are little, we begin to understand the meaning of “MINE.” I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. My friend John and I had a paper route delivering classified ads called ‘the Foxy Shopper.’ It was okay, but every two weeks it was great – payday. Ah yes, the satisfaction of sliding that candy bar or comic book across the counter, proudly handing over my hard-earned money, and reveling in the fruits of my labor. *“Kit Kat candy bar, Spider Man comic book, now you are mine, all mine!”*

I was not thinking, *“If my younger sisters have been hoping for chocolate-covered cookie wafers and comic book delight, now I’ll be able to help them out.”* I had no intention of sharing any of it with them. Sure I loved them (sort of) and I wouldn’t have wanted anything bad to happen to them. But these things were too good to just give away. Besides, how would they ever learn the value of hard work if I just gave them stuff they didn’t work for? Therefore it could be concluded that *not sharing* with them was actually the loving thing to do, right?

It’s a part of life, gaining an understanding of the real meaning of “mine.” You recognize everything you have as a gift of God, and then try to put it to use in a way that is pleasing to God. Our motivation and attitude is what’s most important to God, when we share our wealth and blessings with others. How often God reminded his people of this fact, **“<sup>8</sup>...And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God,”** (Micah 6:8).

This is what the Lord *requires* of his people – a heart that is humble and willing to show mercy to others, to be fair and honest in our personal relationships and private matters. Jesus said the very same thing when he spoke to that expert in the law in our gospel lesson for today. The man asked Jesus, **“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** (Or, *“What does the Lord require of me?”*) He ended up answering his own question, that the Lord requires people to love him above all else and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus told him, *“There you go! You got it! Now go and do what you just said, and you will have eternal life.”* The man thought to himself, *“I already knew that. I didn’t need Jesus to tell me that! I can’t just let Jesus have the last word here...”* Oh, but that day the man would learn the danger of self-trust and how miserably even the most upstanding Christians can and do fail in our attempt to love God and one another.

Do you know what the point of Jesus parable was? The Good Samaritan was ‘good’ in God’s eyes, because he knew what real love was about, something the other two men obviously didn’t understand. God saw this man as good, because through faith in God’s promises, he trusted in God’s love for him and for all people, including that guy lying half-dead on the side of the road. God’s love moved him to do what logic and social norms would have excused him from doing. He saw someone who was in need, and it didn’t matter that they were supposed to be enemies who hated each other. In that moment, the one in need became his neighbor. His neighbor, as he demonstrated, was anyone in need, with whom he could share his compassion and love.

We hear stories of the generosity and kindness of other Christians who take care of one another. And if you have been on the receiving end, because you were in need of help and someone reached out to you, you know what that love feels like. You could say to that person or other people, *“You didn’t have to do that for me!”* but they already knew. Yes, they already knew. It wasn’t an obligation, it wasn’t guilt, and it wasn’t in the expectation of repayment. What a beautiful thing it is to see the way God’s love moves believers to these acts of compassion and kindness!

These acts of compassion and kindness have overflowed from the hearts of believers for thousands of years. We could go all the way back to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve loved each other perfectly as husband and wife. They loved perfectly, because nothing clouded or watered down God’s love. Everything around them and inside of them pointed to that undeniable truth of God’s love. They didn’t need God to spell out his laws and commandments on tables of stone; they had it clearly written in their hearts.

When we look at the Israelites under the leadership of Moses thousands of years later, it’s easy to see how much things changed – all because of sin. God had to give them his Ten Commandments, so they would clearly see again what was written in their hearts. Not only did they have the moral law spelled out for them on tablets of stone, but in addition God gave them laws to direct them in their social and religious lives from day to day. The whole purpose of every one of these laws could be summarized with one word: LOVE.

God wanted his people to express their love for him by their obedience. It would show respect and honor for him, and it would also demonstrate their trust in him. Through Moses, God told his people, **“<sup>7</sup> Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.”** How easy would it have been for a citizen of Israel to take advantage of someone from another foreign land, generally regarded as threats to God’s people? What legal rights or obligations could they claim? None! They were virtually helpless and defenseless. A woman whose husband had died was in a similar position, especially if she had no children to care for her. God made special provisions for these

people, and at the same time designed a way for his children to demonstrate their love, even if that meant foregoing their legal rights and claims.

God set forth these laws and instructed his people to purposely leave behind a portion of their crops that they were harvesting. He told them, <sup>19</sup> ***When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.*** <sup>20</sup> ***When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow.*** <sup>21</sup> ***When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow.*** You might call this God's welfare program in Israel, and yes, it did serve to take care of the social needs of 'the alien, the fatherless, and the widow' – people whose circumstances called for the mercy and compassion of others. You notice, too, God wasn't saying, *"Harvest everything and then deliver it to them."* He urged his people to leave some of their crops behind, so these others could come and harvest what they needed.

In other words, God wasn't encouraging laziness and irresponsibility. What he was encouraging was that his people, whom he had blessed so richly, would take into consideration those around them who were in need. By leaving behind these portions, they expressed their love for God. In faith and love, they could put the needs of others before their own, trusting that the Lord would still be able to provide everything they needed. One day God in human flesh would repeat this message, <sup>34</sup> ***...Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*** <sup>35</sup> ***By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another,*** (John 13:35).

It was the night that Jesus, God's own Son, was betrayed. Hours before, there in the Upper Room, he offered to his disciples a holy meal that would bind them and all believers together in that unity and circle of trust that would last forever. As we gather to receive his body and blood, remember Jesus' command to love one another.

Loving one another, we might be tempted to think, flows naturally and abundantly for us, because we're Christians. Looking out for the needs of others, even if that means giving up what is ours to help them – how could we say no? Have you ever asked a two-year-old to give up their toy, so another can play with it? Yeah, right. And it's not just two-year-olds that act that way, is it?

After the fall into sin, human beings have always been selfish, greedy creatures. We can learn consideration and generosity from others. We can hear God tell us, *"Love one another, love your neighbor, and offer help to those in need."* We may even obey from time to time, giving up our time, our money, or our energy. But the sad truth is, it does not come naturally. Even as believers, we struggle to love our God and each other the way we should. Our love is not perfect. It is often selfish and self-righteous. You know that time you helped out that person, even though they had treated you like dirt – oh yeah, it was undeserved love on your part. *"Well, you know, what can I say? It takes a really special person with a great big heart to do that. I realize not everyone has that much love to give, do they?"*

Even our acts of kindness and compassion are tainted with sin, be that pride or greed, an expectation to be honored or at least thanked by that person. And you know the feeling of anger or disappointment, when your kindness goes unrecognized. *"Tsk, why should I help them next time? They're ungrateful, they're selfish, and they're only nice when they need something."* Oh yes, God has called you to love your neighbor, anyone in need, even...you know who I'm talking about. But the truth is, we have often shown love to others when it was convenient or easy. We have failed to love as God has loved us. We have obscured the shining beauty and preciousness of God's love in Christ.

That love, not ours, is the reason why our faults and failures are covered by the precious blood of Christ. Jesus showed his compassion and love perfectly at all times, even to those who wanted him to suffer and die on a cross. Even to those of us whose sins prompted Jesus to experience the torment and agony of hell. <sup>18</sup> ***Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there.*** By his innocent blood God redeemed you from the slavery of sin, death and the devil, freeing you for a life of willing obedience and love for him and one another.

Brothers and sisters so richly blessed by our heavenly Father, give thanks for the resources and blessings that he has entrusted to you. Humbly recognize that he is the Giver of all good things, none of which we have deserved. And then freely offer to those in need whatever or however you can help them. Because of Jesus, God sees your acts of loving kindness as something pleasing and holy in his sight. Because of the perfect love and forgiveness he has given you, you have much love to share with others, to show kindness and compassion to those in need. Expect to experience the joy and the satisfaction of the new life that you are free to live, all because of our crucified and risen Savior. Amen.