



From the Bishop:

January 2026

Several years ago, when I was a young pastor serving in a congregation, a member came to tell me he was leaving the church for another one. When I asked why, he said, “I don’t like all the lovey-dovey stuff.” I was caught off guard and didn’t have a very good response in the moment. Now I wish I had said something like, “When you say ‘lovey, dovey’ are you referring to the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says we are to love even our enemies? Or when Jesus says his new command is that we love one another as he has loved us? Or when Jesus, hanging on the cross, says, ‘Father, forgive them?’ Or when the risen Jesus shows up on the shore, feeds his friends, and asks Peter – three times – ‘Do you love me?’ Or, maybe you mean Paul, who says that you can have all kinds of gifts and accomplishments, but without love, you are nothing. Or when Paul writes that out of faith, hope, and love, love is the greatest or ...”. You get the idea. But I didn’t have those words that day.

Now, several years later, I wish I could answer him again. Because as much as he thought he was rejecting something weak, living into God’s expansive love is anything but. It can be beautiful and life-giving, yes – but it is also demanding and hard. Especially when that love calls us to care for people we don’t particularly like, let alone agree with.

Today, in this fractured time, in this fractured world, how do we live into being ‘lovey-dovey’ in the way God first shows us through Jesus? How do we love when we’re afraid? How do we love those who are causing real harm? How do we love people with whom we feel uncomfortable or “icky?” How do we love those we would rather avoid? How do we love those we despise?

First, we have to be honest with ourselves. As clearly as we may see the sin of others, we also must acknowledge our own. We fall short time and time again. We cannot justify ourselves out of sin, nor can we place ourselves above anyone else. God is the one who comes in Jesus to bring wholeness, reconciliation, and salvation – not just to some, but to the whole world (John 3:16-17).

Second, every person is made in the image of God. Every person is a small miracle. God formed each person with care and intention. Every person, all eight billion of us on this planet, are a wonder and a joy to God. God loves each person beyond measure. God loves those fleeing countries (like Moses and the holy family). God loves those tangled up in messes of their own making (like David). God loves those who are trying their very best (like Martha). God even loves those who would rather scroll on their phones than engage (well ... for a scriptural reference perhaps this could be those churches in Revelation who are neither hot nor cold). God loves us all. Thank God!

And because of God’s amazing love, we are called to listen to one another and open our hearts to one another. This, of course, also means speaking up when there is injustice or harm – not out of hatred but out of love. Love rooted in Christ requires us to name and resist when harmful decisions made by those in power damage lives, especially when those decisions fall hardest on people who have been marginalized, silenced or erased. Love rooted in Christ pushes us to advocate for policies and practices that move people and systems toward equity and inclusion – whether we are talking about immigrants or farmers, children or grandmothers, those with homes and those without – neighbors all.

Third, we cannot love as God calls us to love on our own (see #1 above). We need the Holy Spirit and we need community. We need one another for accountability, and we need each other to help us journey forward together – beyond fear, beyond hatred, beyond the walls that we so easily build. Love cannot remain theoretical and abstract. No. Love is gritty and enfleshed.

As we begin 2026, I pray that, through the Holy Spirit, we love God and one another in our words and our actions. I pray that we practice loving all – even our enemies. And I pray that in this new year, others will look at us and say, “Wow. They are fiercely ‘lovely-dovey.’”

Following the Way of Jesus, may it be so.

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From the VEEP:

"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: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22: 37-39)

I love you! How often do you hear those words? How often do you say them to others? Besides your pets, I mean. Let's face it, I tell my cat I love her more than I tell the people around me. I was thinking about this because back in November, Brian Crane, the

cartoonist behind the strip "Pickles" ran a series of strips wherein Opal, Earl's wife, complained because he rarely told her he loved her. Earl is gob smacked. After all, he told Opal he loved her at their wedding, when their daughter was born, and probably on their 50th wedding anniversary - why should she need to hear it more often than that? Surely she knew he loved her because of how he treated her.

I think there are a lot of people out there like Earl. They don't say the words because they assume people will know how they feel because of their actions. I am also reminded of the song "Do you Love me?" from Fiddler on the Roof. After twenty-five years of marriage, Tevye asks Golde if she loves him. She responds by saying she does his laundry, cooks his meals, gave him children, shares his bed and his life. Ah yes, he says, but does she love him? She finally responds by asking him if all that isn't love, what is? The song ends with them each declaring their love in words, which, they remind each other, doesn't change anything, but after twenty-five years, it is nice to know.

God calls us to love God, neighbor, and even our enemies. I know that means through loving action and not just lip service, but it is also important to say and hear the words.

God loves you. As we approach epiphany, this is the revelation that the magi receive. God's love is for everyone, not just a select few. It doesn't matter what we do or say, "nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow." (Romans 8: 31-39) ALL of us are loved by God. As the body of Christ, we are called to reflect that love to those around us.

I don't know what it is that makes so many of us so reticent to say the words. Maybe saying them out loud implies a commitment we aren't sure we are ready to fulfill. Regardless, since we are called to love, maybe we should announce that a little more often. So, as we enter this new calendar year and we make our list of resolutions, might I suggest we resolve not to be the Earls of the world, refraining from saying those simple words. Rather, let us shout to God and to our neighbors: I love you. Te amo. Je t'aime. Ich liebe dich. Ti amo.

أحبك. 我爱你. ฉันรักคุณ. Я тебя люблю. я люблю тебе. אני אוהב אותך. 愛してます. Jag älskar dig. Ik houd van jou. Rakastan sinua. Aloha wau iā 'oe. Ixixán. (I used Google translate - I hope these are correct). God loves you. I love you. You are loved!

Here's what I or the council have been up to in December:

- Synod Executive Committee: Met December 11 via Zoom. Among other business we allocated the yearly disbursement of funds from the Maritime Ministries and Mission in Washington Endowments.
- Synod Equity Listening Team: I continue to have 1:1 meetings with leaders throughout the synod.
- Synod Policy Review Team: We continue to meet to review and revise policies with an eye to relevance and equity.

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