22nd Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 25, Year A
A Sermon Preached by Fr Ian M Delinger
on October 25, 2026

Deuteronomy 34:1-12 / Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17 / 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 / Matthew 22:34-46

May the words of my mouth
and the meditations of all our hearts
be acceptable in Your sight,
O God, our strength and our Redeemer.

I wonder if the drafters of the Lectionary purposely paired the reading from Deuteronomy with the Gospel so that we could reflect deeply and painfully on what it means to love God and to love neighbor. Allow me to reorder two verses of Deuteronomy:

> *The Lord said to Moses, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:"*
>
> *Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negeb, and the Plain—that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar.*

This is roughly what we now know as the Holy Land, the Land of Milk and Honey. As Moses completes the 40 years of the Exodus, the stage is set for the Israelites to enter into the Promised Land. But what comes next, in the Book of Joshua, is the obliteration of the Canaanites who already live there. It's 20-some chapters of God-sanctioned genocide.

While there are a few less bloody theories of how the Israelites came to be in the Holy Land, the classic view of Joshua – foreshadowed in today's reading of Deuteronomy – is a narration of the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites: a prime example of the victors writing the history. And the promise of this land is coupled with the greatest Commandments: *Love God and Love Neighbor*. And it must be

noted that both of those Commandments *precede* the genocide in Canaan. "Love God" is the *Shema* first voiced in Deuteronomy ch6; "Love Neighbor" first uttered in Leviticus 19. Jesus puts the two Commandments together, and because they are so foundational in Judaism, the Pharisees do not disagree.

I know that today's OT reading is Deuteronomy, but it directly points to the 20+ chapters of genocide in Joshua that we leave out of the Sunday Lectionary. Joshua is not insignificant or irrelevant. It was part of the scriptural basis for the Doctrine of Discovery, for the Manifest Destiny and for the continued invasions of Palestine. We, as a national and global Christian denomination, and I as a spiritual leader believe that God:

> *…caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning*.

This is our opportunity to struggle with this bit of scripture that leaves *us*, 2,000 years later, with a conundrum: *What do we make of our Commandments to Love God and Love Neighbor alongside what happened to fulfill the promise of the Holy Land, both way back then and what is happening there today?* Let's first explore God's Love, Love of Neighbor and Love of God.

God's Love

Our reading from Deuteronomy is an explicit expression of God's Love for God's People. The writer demonstrates the deep belief that God loves the Israelites through their liberation from slavery and now through the fruition of the Promised Land. The writer also expresses that this is God's way of showing love. In other words, we, the reader, are to understand that the promise is an expression of God's Love. But our exegesis uncovers that this is what the writer himself believes to be an expression of God's love.

I am a firm believer in the Canonical View of the Bible. This is the approach that focuses my understanding of scripture through the whole of the Bible: *What is the big picture story that we receive from Genesis to Revelation?* For me, the main takeaway from the Bible as a whole is that God loves God's people and all that

God made through Creation, and fundamentally, it was and is good. God shows that love through Jesus Christ, not only as revealed to us in scripture, but revealed to us *and through us* by the power of the Holy Spirit. Individual passages help us explore that love. And we have to understand the context and motivations of those passages, which, as stated earlier, are written for our learning.

God's Love – given freely – opens us up to amazing things, more than we can ask or imagine. And if we believe ourselves to be Children of God, we need to understand what that means for those who do not believe themselves to be Children of God, or, more challenging, those whom *we may believe* are not Children of God. What does God's Love mean for them? If we believe that the misfortune of others – particularly the annihilation of an entire culture – is a sign of God's Love, what does that tell us about a Creator God who looked at what was made and declared it good?

When we look for signs of God's Love, we have to understand that it is endless. As they say: *It's not pie!* There's enough of God's Love for you as there is for our brothers and sisters in Gaza, along the Bob Jones Trail, in the other political party. And whatever blessings or wrath God has for them is up to God, not up to us. We must work on maintaining our own relationship with God. Just as one of your own children's relationship doesn't determine your relationship with another child of yours, neither does God's Love of you depend on God's relationship with someone not like you. And ultimately, whom God choses to love is not up to us. It's up to us to open up ourselves to God's love and assume that God loves everyone, even if we do not.

Always look for the signs of God's Love for you … and the signs of God's Love for others.

Love of Neighbor

As mentioned earlier, today's Gospel is the first time the *Shema* – Love God – and Love Neighbor have been put together. Luke's version is followed by the question: *Who is my neighbor*. Jesus answers that question with the Parable of the Good

Samaritan. In modern scholarship, preaching and pastoral ministry, the discussion around *Who is my neighbor* is a red herring. It is a distraction from getting on with loving our neighbor. *Everyone* is our neighbor, whether we want believe that or not, and we are to love them, whether we want to or not. And that's hard, and not always accomplished.

On more than one occasion in my ministry, someone has justified their bad behavior with the Christian concepts of love, specifically Love of Neighbor. Even though they had expressed egregious behavior toward me, they declared that it was *my* responsibility as a Christian to love *them*. And I cannot underestimate how blatant it has been. Literally: *I may have done this to you, but as a Christian, you are to forgive me and love me*. With no remorse or repentance on their part. This has happened with both lay people and clergy. While theologically they might be right, they are also completely wrong! Jesus didn't tell the Pharisees to ignore bad or even illegal behavior. What He did was call us all to higher standard than the average person.

Jesus knows that love is hard. Do I want to sit next to, let alone express love of, someone who believes me to be subhuman because of the color my skin, or that I should "*go back to where I came from*" or that I should un-alived? Those people exist – they exist in our community, and many don't consider such views as extreme. And I'm supposed to love them as my neighbor. I struggle with that.

What society and culture modeled for Jesus, His followers and the Pharisees and Sadducees are what society and culture model for us today: Violence, revenge and retribution are highly valued expressions of strength and dominance. To love your neighbor, and to consider *all people* your neighbor, is so completely countercultural to those values that it is very challenging to live up to.

But with the help of God, we will. I'm not going to excuse your bad behavior because Jesus told me to love my neighbor. But I will engage in reconciliation with you if you will take the process seriously and we both agree to do the hard work

and endure the challenges. If we want to genuinely endeavor to Love Neighbor as Jesus taught, then we have to be willing to do that hard work.

On a bigger scale, we cannot love our neighbor and support genocide. We cannot love our neighbor and support indiscriminate kidnapping and deportation without due process. We cannot love our neighbor and destroy Creation, as Nia so eloquently pointed out in her sermon a couple of weeks ago.

We can struggle to understand what it means to love those who commit atrocities while calling them to cease and desist, just as you can struggle to understand what it means to love the person who wronged you and ruined one aspect of your life while attempting to engage in reconciliation. As alluded to before, love of neighbor is coupled with reconciliation. And perhaps we don't engage enough in what reconciliation really means or involves.

Love of God

How do you express your Love of God? The most obvious is through your public worship and private prayer.

But we must not mistake our Love of God with attempts to do God's bidding for what *we believe* God despises. We must not take passages of scripture out of context and be vigilantes for God. We are to remember that *all people* are God's Children, and to Love God is to always strive for the welfare of God's Children. That's the harder task: *to strive for the welfare of all God's Children* as an act of Love of God.

Missionary and relief agencies of today have come such a long way from the missionaries of the 18C and 19C. Gone are the days of forced conversions and destruction of indigenous ways of life to be replaced with European ways of doing things. Missionary and relief agencies today work within the local structure in order to provide what is missing of the basic human needs like water, food and shelter. They try to get aid into war-torn or disaster-struck areas. Episcopal Relief and Development (on the Christian side) and World Central Kitchen (on the

secular side) don't ask your religion or your race or your political party. They see Children of God in need. Loving God leads to loving neighbor. Loving God is doing God's will as we pray in the Lord's Prayer, not *appeasing* God for what God may not like.

To:

> *love the Lord your God with all your heart,*
> *and with all your soul, and with all your mind*

is not White Christian Nationalism. It's not extreme Zionism. It's not Jihadi. It's surrendering yourself to do God's will and to share in the Kingdom of God with all God's Children. Judgment is squarely in God's corner, not ours. We are simply called to *Love*.

I think what we learn from the juxtaposition of these scriptures is a warning about God's Love and how we express our Love of God. As has happened throughout our Judeo-Christian Hsitory, we have mistaken God's Love for our own desires. We have decided that, as God's Chosen People, God will give us what we want. That has led to destruction on a global scale that we live with and struggle with still to this day. It has led to societal and cultural norms that we continue to untangle. It has led to strife, division and estrangement in our personal lives that have wounded us deeper than whatever we initially wanted brings us joy.

We have been:

> *entrusted with the message of the gospel, not to please mortals, but*
> *to please God who tests our hearts.*

Loving God, God's Love, and Loving Neighbor are all wrapped into one package together in that message. They cannot live in silos. If you love God and love neighbor, then God's Love for you – as you experience and interpret it – must be wedded to God's love for your neighbor.