

Search My Heart  
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 Mark 12:28-34

I want to start off today by saying that I have lied to you all.  
 Now this was a lie of omission but still.  
 When I read Psalm 139 I thought that it was perfect for talking about relationship with self.  
 I mean it is just so poetic and beautiful:

If I take the wings of the morning  
 And settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
 Even there your hand shall lead me.

For it was you who formed my innermost being;  
 You knit me together in my mothers womb.  
 I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made...

And then you get to the end of the Psalm:

Oh that you would kill the wicked, O God,  
 And that the blood thirsty would depart from me.  
 Those who speak of you maliciously  
 And lift themselves up against you for evil

Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?  
 And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?  
 I hate them with perfect hatred,  
 I count them my enemies.

\*facepalm\*

This was just like my last sermon  
 when I was trying to preach about deepening relationships with others  
 and I pick a story that involved David threatening to kill a whole village,  
 a man having a heart attack and dying,  
 and then David promptly taking that man's wife for his own.

David has proved so helpful in this psalm again.

So yeah, I admit that I left the bloodthirsty part out when I had Rose read the psalm.

But of course, as I studied this psalm as well as the Mark 12 passage,  
 I realized that this vengeful section of the psalm is actually really important to the  
 concept of deepening you relationship with yourself, or self-love.

So I was caught in my lie of omission. And I am almost sorry about it.

But we will come back to that difficult part of the text, because first I want to talk about Jesus and love.

When Jesus said: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.”

What did he mean?

What does this complete, all encompassing love look like?

Last fall my fiancé Nick and I participated in an adult sexuality class.

During that class we would spend time unpacking concepts and definitions. So when we talked about love, we would inevitably talk about intimacy.

The facilitator of the class had us go around and share what we think about when we think about intimacy.

Take a second and think about how you would have answered the question, “What do you think of when you think about the word intimacy”?

When it got to be my turn to share, without thinking I blurted out a story that I thought encapsulated the concept of intimacy:

One time my friend Mollie and I were out running errands. I have lived with Mollie for the past seven years, we were roommates our first year of college and I have lived with her ever since—

Anyway as we were out and about we just happened to stumble upon Arbys and accidentally ordered a large curly fry.

So on our way back, Mollie without me saying anything, started feeding me curly fries while I was driving.

After a bit we realized what had happened and we started dying laughing.

We realized that we have gotten to the point in our relationship that she knows exactly what I want or need, without me having to ask.

She just knows me, she gets me.

It’s the kind of closeness that surpasses words.

The kind of relationship where you know someone so well—perhaps better than yourself—and yet they continue to surprise you

Which makes you love them even more.

That story, while it is perhaps not the conventional definition of intimacy—it was what I immediately thought of.

Perhaps this is the kind of relationship Jesus wants us to have with God, our neighbor, and ourselves.

French fries and all ☺

So what does it mean to love your neighbor *as yourself*?

I have heard people say that you can't truly love others if you don't first love yourself.  
 I am inclined to think that this is true.  
 Or perhaps you can love others but it is a lot harder if you don't first love yourself.  
 I think that we can end up projecting the pieces and qualities of ourselves that we don't  
 love on to others.  
 We hate in others what we hate in ourselves.

Now this is the point where I talk about one of my biggest pet peeves in life, other than  
 chewing noises.

It is a little something I like to call Menno-humility.  
 Menno-humility is this martyr complex that I see all the time in Mennonites.  
 It honestly could be a remnant from when the Anabaptists were literally martyred—but  
 that was a long time ago folks.  
 Menno-humility is the idea that self-confidence, pride, and self-love are inherently  
 selfish, sinful, and shameful qualities.  
 Maybe people won't say this quite so openly and clearly,  
 But over and over again I see Mennonites shy away and deflect compliments:

Have any of you something like this happen before?:

“Sue this casserole is *wonderful*, you did a *fantastic* job.”

“Oh Esther that's nothing—I just followed the recipe in More-With-Less.”

Sue, or whoever you are, it doesn't matter if you “just followed the recipe”—you baked  
 that casserole to perfection!

Own your casserole!

Be proud of your culinary skills, carefully honed after all these years of feeding your  
 family and food prep for potlucks!

Pride and conceit are two very different things.

Pride is an acknowledgment of your God-given skills and gifts.

Conceit is the posture we take when we think that our skills and gifts are superior to  
 others.

True humility is the acknowledgement that everyone brings something different and  
 valuable to the table.

It is *not* the self-deprecating rejection of all that shines and sparkles within you.

True self love comes from the total embodiment of the fact that you are the majestic  
 product of the Creator God that knit you together in your mother's womb.

The God sculpted you with wonder and awe.

The God who approached your creation with the same kind of fearful, awe you feel when  
 you stand near the edge of a cliff or at the base of a waterfall.

**That God** loves you and your sparkly, creaturely self.

So own what makes you shine.

Because if God created you with awe, fear, and wonder, then you better marvel and  
 cherish your amazing self.

While I was studying for this sermon I stumbled upon this bit of a poem by Nayyira Waheed:

“My heart is in my mind.  
I think that is why I am an artist.”  
Part of loving yourself is finding and loving what makes you unique.  
This requires self-awareness.  
This involves time with yourself.  
When was the last time you hung out with yourself?  
No agenda, just time to be.  
When was the last time you learned something new about yourself?  
When was the last time you held yourself with reverence, with care, cherishing your body, your voice, your quirks, your sense of humor?  
When was the last time you congratulated yourself for a job well done?  
Have you ever measured the value of your worth, separate from what tasks you complete, what you produce, accomplish, or consume?  
If you treat yourself with compassion and grace, it will be a lot easier to do the same for your neighbor.  
At the same time I have to acknowledge that it is easier to love the best parts of yourself. Yet we are more than just highlight reels.  
How do you love the parts of yourself that you hate?  
Further, how do you love the parts of your neighbor that you hate?  
Or love the neighbor that you perceive as hateful towards others?

Let me jump back to the rather violent ending of the otherwise breathtaking Psalm 139.

**WHY** after going on and on about the majesty of a God who loves and knows so completely would David spew words of such hate and vengeance?

I think the last two verses of this psalm are pretty telling:

Search me, O God and know my heart;  
Test me and know my thoughts.  
See if there is any wicked way in me,  
And lead me in the way everlasting.

Whether David knew it or not, I think this right here is the most crucial component of loving yourself.

David knows that he cannot run from God,  
Because wherever he tries to go,  
God is already there.

God knows that David is harboring nasty, violent thoughts—so what does David do?  
Instead of hating himself and wallowing in shame and guilt for the parts of himself that are not so pretty,  
He brings them before God and lays them out like offerings on an altar.

He cuts himself open before his maker and says—  
 God, look, there is hate in me and I don't want it to be there—  
 I want you to take the wicked from me and lead me in your everlasting way

To love ourselves, all parts of ourselves, we need to do this same work that David did.  
 This is hard work.  
 It involves honesty with ourselves (which is the hardest kind of honesty in my book).  
 It involves vulnerability.  
 It involves an uncomfortable intimacy with ourselves,  
 Facing our own weaknesses and tender spots  
 Our anxiety, our fear, our anger, our resentment

In all of this it is good to remember that this is **our** work to do, not anyone else's.  
 This doesn't mean others can help, like friends, family, a counselor, or a spiritual director.  
 But others can't do this work for us.  
 And we can't do it for them.  
 This is hard to remember.

In order to love our neighbor fully we need to recognize that loving someone is not the same as a thinly veiled attempt at changing them.  
 Loving your neighbor means accepting them fully—faults and all.  
 You don't have to love all their choices,  
 but in a healthy relationship you can embrace them with your heart, soul, mind and strength because you realize that the Lord your God lives in them too.

Love your neighbor as yourself by first doing the hard, heart work of knowing yourself.  
 Feed yourself french fries before you even realize you want french fries.

Love your neighbor as yourself by forever searching for divine mystery, divine sparkle.  
 Forever be awestruck when you find it.

Love your neighbor as yourself by giving space and grace to **be**  
 To bloom.  
 To dazzle.

Love your neighbor as yourself by remembering that wherever you go, God is already there.  
 Love your neighbor as yourself by truly believing, to your core, that you are fearfully and wonderfully made.  
 Love your neighbor as yourself by embracing the vulnerability, the intimacy that comes with baring your soul before your creator God, saying  
 "Search me, O God, and know my heart."  
 Amen.