

**The Reverend Marjo Anderson**

**Narrative Lectionary 2.28 – Lent 4**  
**Mark 12:28-44**

**22 March 2020**  
**Salem, Bridgeport**

**“Loving God”**

Into a world under viral attack, filled with anxiety and fear, and teetering on the edge of panic,  
Jesus speaks words from the Hebrew Scriptures, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One”.  
And who is this God?

Last week we shouted out together,

“Our God is greater, our God is stronger, our God is higher than any other,  
our God is healer, awesome and power, our God, our God!

And if our God is for us, then what could ever stop us?

And if our God is with us, then who could stand against?” (*Our God by Tomlin, Reeves, Myrin & Redman*)

Our God is greater than any virus, stronger than any illness, and higher than any fear!

Our God is a God of infinite power!

Our God is a God of unending love!

And we are to love God with all of our being – with our all our heart and soul and body and mind –

not because God needs our love,

but because God desires to be in a loving relationship with us,

and God knows that the more we open ourselves to give love, the more open we are to receive love.

It’s like two bottles, both holding the same amount,

but one with a small, narrow opening, and one with a large, wide opening.

Which is easier to fill? The one with the small opening or the one with the large one?

The one with the large opening, of course!

The more open we are, the easier it is to pour love out, and the easier it is for love to be poured back in.

So how do we become more open when the world feels as if it’s closing in on us?

How do we love God more

when we can no longer go to worship, or join together in communion, or gather together as God’s people?

How do we love our neighbor more

when we’re afraid to get near them,

or when we’re angry that they’re not reacting the way we think they should,

or they’re not caring for us the way we want to be cared for?

Well, I was taught that the Chinese word for “crisis” consists of 2 characters –  
one is “danger” and one is “opportunity”.

We can look at the situation we’re in and see all the dangers and react in fear

or we can look around us and see all of the opportunities and respond in faith.

Despite the dangers and challenges and problems we face,

if we turn the situation around and look at it from another side, a different perspective, a new angle,  
opportunities abound.

So what if we can’t come together for worship? Worship is just one way we show our love for God.

So what if our food pantry is closed? That’s just one way we show our love for neighbor.

In this time where nothing is as it was,

how can we love God with our whole being – heart, mind, body and soul?

And how can we love our neighbor?

Let me offer just 2 possibilities for each.

### **How might we love God physically, with our bodies?**

MY latest way has been to come into the chancel here, turn on some very lively praise music,  
and let the joy pour out as I dance with sheer abandon!  
But if praise dancing isn't your thing, here are 2 possibilities....

**Breathe.** Intentionally, breathe.

Remember that into our beings God breathed God's own Spirit/wind/breath and we became living souls.  
As long as we breathe we have life; when we cease breathing, our bodies die.  
Breathe in God's peace and breathe out anxiety. Breathe in faith; breathe out fear.  
Breathe in forgiveness; breathe out judgment. You get the idea.  
Whenever you feel anxious or afraid, stop and breathe, remembering that it is God's breath that fills you.  
So one way to love God physically is the focus on your breath.

Another way is to focus on **Movement**.

No matter what your physical limitations and challenges are at the moment,  
be grateful for the parts of your body that still work and for all the things you can still do.  
If you can no longer run, enjoy every moment you can walk!  
If you're having trouble getting out of your chair, give thanks once you're on your feet!  
If you wake up and your back aches, think about and try out all the ways your body can still move  
and then give glory to the God who designed the intricate, complex machines that our bodies are.  
So you can love God with your body in your breathing and in your moving.

### **How do we love God emotionally, with our heart?**

Again, let me offer two possibilities....

What moves you emotionally? **What activity fills your heart?**

Maybe it's listening to music, or reading poetry, or watching a Hallmark movie on television.  
Decide on one thing that you will do each day to exercise your emotional self,  
and then give thanks for the capacity to be moved  
from pain to pleasure or from fear to faith or from despair to delight.  
So one way to love God emotionally is to engage in an activity that speaks to your heart and to be grateful for it.

A second way is to **connect with someone who brings you joy**.

Maybe it's a Skype call with your grandson,  
or a phone call to your elderly aunt,  
or a thank you note to someone who has helped you in the past.  
Connecting with them, offering them an encouraging word, and telling them that you thank God for them  
is another way of loving God with your heart.

So you can love God with your heart by engaging in an activity or connecting with a person that brings you joy.

### **How do we love God intellectually, with our mind?**

One way is to **delve more deeply into God's word**.

Many people have complained they have no time to come out to a Bible study or even read the Bible at home.  
But what would happen if you turned off the TV news with all its stories that increase fear,  
and opened the Bible to read stories that increase faith?  
So one way to live God with our minds is to study God's Word.

A second way is to **engage in conversation with someone whose beliefs are different than yours** –  
not so you can prove you're right and they're wrong and not so that you can change their minds,  
but simply because you're curious as to what God might have to say through them to you.

Engaging in dialog with those who are different expands our minds which is a way of honoring and loving God.

So you can love God with your mind by studying God's Word  
and talking about matters of faith with folks who are different from you.

## **How do we love God spiritually, with our souls?**

Normally we love God spiritually through our worship, but what do we do now that we can't come to church? Again, two possibilities....

Maybe you can't come to worship here at Salem, but Salem worship will continue to come to you.

### **Every week we will worship online together via Salem's Facebook page.**

If you use Facebook, you probably already know how to find our service.

If you don't use Facebook but you have a computer or a smartphone, we want to get you connected.

You don't have to do anything else with Facebook if you don't want to,

but at least allow us to bring worship to you that way.

Of course there are many other churches streaming services, and we encourage you to watch those also, but it's important that all of us at Salem come together – if only virtually – to worship together.

### **And, in addition to worship together, I encourage you to worship God alone.**

If you don't already have a sacred space set up in your home, I encourage you to create one –

a room or a corner or a chair where you can go to be alone with God

to pray, read God's Word, and offer thanks and praise.

### **So there are 8 ways that we can love God with our hearts, souls, minds and bodies.**

#### **And here are 2 ways we can love our neighbor as ourselves.**

##### **One way is to reach out to individuals in need.**

Maybe there's someone who lives alone whom you can call and check in on daily or weekly.

Maybe there's someone who's under particular stress – someone who's ill,

or someone who's working on the front lines of this battle like in healthcare,

or someone who's juggling working at home with caring for small children.

Reaching out to them in a way that alleviates anxiety, provides peace, and fosters faith

is one way to show love of neighbor.

##### **Another way is to reach out to organizations in need.**

Maybe you can order a meal from a local restaurant struggling to stay afloat with take-out & deliveries.

Maybe you can use an Uber driver whose business is down significantly.

Maybe you can donate to an organization like the Council of Churches

that's still trying to serve those in greatest need.

Or simply your own church that has ongoing expenses

despite the fact that the offering plates are not getting passed around each week.

Jesus reminds us that our God is a God of power and love,

and the more we love God and love our neighbor, the more we open ourselves to experience God's love.

Love God with your body. Breathe. Move.

Love God with your heart.

Engage in an activity that moves you emotionally or connect with a person who brings you joy,

Love God with your mind. Read God's Word and discuss it with folks who are different from you,

Love God with your spirit.

Continue to worship with your Salem church family and set time aside at home to worship God alone.

And love your neighbor as yourself. Reach out to individuals and support organizations in need.

We are going through something that can cause us to fear. But Scripture tells us to "Fear not".

Our gathering song today witnessed to the fact that

Through it all we've learned to trust in Jesus, learned to trust in God & learned to depend upon God's Word.

And our next song, too, reminds us of what we can expect from the God of power and love.

So, please, repeat after me, these words of Travis Greene written to praise the God we love:

**You move mountains / You cause walls to fall / with your power / perform miracles! /**

**There is nothing / that's impossible / and we're standing here / only because You made a way! Amen**