

A mother calls it love. She asks questions of her teenage daughter – wants to know where she will be – whom she will be with – what's been happening in her world. The daughter calls it nagging – not trusting – being nosy.

In fifty years the daughter will be calling it love when she checks up on mom – when she tells her to get a hearing aid – when she warns her to use her cane – when she makes arrangements for mom to enter a nursing home because burners on the stove haven't been getting turned off. And now mom will resent the nagging – the checking up – the not trusting her.

And in the in between time a daughter will come for a visit in the mother's home. Does love mean that a mother waits on a daughter hand and foot? Does love mean that a daughter does all sorts of tasks to help out mom? When there is love who does the cooking, who the cleaning up? Does love mean that a grandmother offers advice on how the grandchildren are being raised? Or an opinion on the daughter's housekeeping habits?

Love is a kind of complicated thing.

What is the greatest commandment, Jesus?

Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And a second is like it – "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

No one debated about these being the greatest commandments. Not then, not now.

To love God is the greatest commandment. Love for God is the foundation – the starting point – the center for everything else. But the law and the prophets and all that is written in the New Testament as well assumes that love for others follows from our love for God for God loves each of my neighbors.

But what does it mean to love?

I ask myself how I know when I am being loved?

People who love me give me gifts. People who love me say kind words. People who love me do send cards or write notes. But I think of three things that tell me most of all that I am loved.

When someone loves me that person takes time for me – wants to be with me – be near me.

I think of God. It is easy to say I love God and then to make no space for God in my life. If I am too busy to pray, too busy to think about God, too busy to give thanks I might ask whether my love for God is only words or only an intention.

When someone loves me that person listens to me. So many of the problems between a mother and a daughter with which I began would be solved if there were listening. Too often there is mind reading instead. Too often I decide what another would want from me without ever asking.

How do you know what God wants for you? Will you read God's mind – will you search in your heart for understanding of God or will you listen to God's word? Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear let him hear." Listen he was saying. If you love me, then listen to me.

The third way I know someone loves me is that they allow me to give to them. Some people will never take a gift. Every time I give something they give me back more. But the one who loves me can receive from me without worrying if my gift demands a gift in return.

To love God is to receive from God. God has given you the whole world. God has given you the suffering and death and resurrection of God's son, Jesus Christ. God has given you God's own Holy Spirit. Has God asked for payment in return? No – only that you would receive these gifts in faith.

But it is not only our love for God that might be expressed in taking time, and receiving and listening but your love for your neighbor as well.

Do you want to show love for your neighbor in need. Take your time and spend it with that neighbor. The child who plays on the street in front of your house – the friend who is going through a crisis – the elderly person who resides in a nursing home – the convicted felon who is in prison – the person who has suffered in a natural disaster. Love for each of them begins with your time for them.

Listen. Every Sunday morning in this place there are people waiting for someone to listen to them. Ask a question and then listen. Carefully with all of your attention listen. Your neighbor will never tire of your listening.

Ask your neighbor for help. What a strange way to show love you say?

A couple of years ago a group of people from this congregation were gathered. Each of the people said they wanted to help someone in need. But not one of them wanted to be the one who is helped. I will be strong when my life is in a crisis but I want you to be ready to receive help from me when the crisis is yours. It makes me feel good to be able to help someone. I'll bet the same is true of you. If I love you I will let you help me – then you will feel great. That mother of that teenager who so wants to help her daughter might ask for a little help instead. As the daughter learns to help she will learn love – and feel better about herself as well.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself. May God grant

it.