

14th Sunday After Pentecost

August 29, 2025

A pure religion? Is such a thing possible? For some, it is the very thing that they live, but it does not look the same on the outside. We go through the motions we go through, but what is going on inside is sometimes quite the opposite.

In this world, filled with deceit and broken promises, it is difficult to begin to comprehend the reality of God. Scripture tells us that God is love. Jesus tells us that there is no greater love than that one would lay down their life for another. God, the Father and the only begotten Son, are in an eternal love relationship. We are invited into that relationship. This is the goal of our faith: that we would be forever united with Trinity in love.

It is said that absence makes the heart grow fonder. Is the Lord remaining somewhat distant (from our perspective) to grow in us the fondness? Of course, the Lord is always present, but we sometimes feel that He is distant. I know in the experience of where I received my training, it was steeped in politically correct language, demanding that I chafe at the language of Scripture. But Scripture speaks of the Father and the Son. Am I to apologize for God? How can I when all that I have encountered is pure love. Love, not as the world knows it, but pure love. Jesus laid down His life for me. He loves you so much that He did the same for you. In fact, if you were the only person who ever existed, He would have done the same just for you. So great is the Father's love that He has more than enough for each one of us. You who are parents know this in part. When you have more than one child, your love is not cut in half, but grows to encompass each child, your spouse, and those around you even more.

John tells us that He was the beloved disciple. Are you a beloved disciple? I encourage you to start thinking this way. Do not think of love in the world's terms, but in terms of how our Savior has loved us, of how the Father loves us. Jesus did all that was necessary for our salvation. Do you hear the Lord say to you in the morning, " Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone?" Do you hear the God of love calling you?

In this world, we sometimes think of God in terms of what we are to do and what we should not do. In a pure way, sometimes boys are boys. Boys will eat without washing their hands. The fastidious become upset at the breaking of rules. Our Lord knows us. There are times when we just do what we do. Our worship is not about getting everything right. It is about living the life our Lord gives us. Yes, do learn obedience, but not for the sake of approval, right conduct, or appearances, but for the sake of love. In love, noone is walking around with a clipboard, counting infractions or appearances. Love is fluid. It is motion. It is living. Listen to the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians again. "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angles, but do not have love . . ." Love does not seek its own. Love flows. What great love is this that has come down from heaven to rescue us and bring us into the eternal love which is our Triune God?

Your heart will speak the truth as love comes out. Yes, we know that the unredeemed heart is wicked and deceitful, as Scripture reminds us, but the redeemed, cleaned heart abounds in the love which is from the Father. Yes, Christ is making all things new. He has given you grace and mercy so that the Father will create in you a clean and new heart. This is the love into which we are to live.

We know the wickedness of this age. We see it all around us, and sometimes it is in us. We are fed all day long with the pablum that love is what we feel. But our Lord shows us that

love comes from the inside and reflects who we are regardless of how we feel. Jesus teaches us that sometimes we may cling to traditions and abandon the commandments. We are told to love the Lord, our God, above all things. Yes, above everything else, hold to the gift of your salvation as the most precious thing in your life. Hold on to the love of God which surpasses all the wealth of this world. Above circumstances and feelings, cling to the Lord. He has led you, He is leading you, and He will walk with you all the days of your life. Come into His eternal presence and dwell there.

This world has been most impacted when the lovers of God, who were pursued by the love of God to live in this age, preparing for the age to come gave of themselves for the sake of the love of God. Countless witnesses throughout the ages who have given their lives rather than deny the love of God. This love is not selfish, but always pouring itself out knowing that the storehouse of God is boundless. The more you give, the more you receive. Love teaches us to give for its own sake and not for the wicked pursuit of gain. You love because you were first loved. You were wonderfully made by the loving Creator to dwell in His majesty forever.

You and I need grace because we do sin and there is disobedience within us. We sometimes live what this world calls love, being driven by our feelings. This is why we begin each worship with confession for our souls. We need to be cleansed from the inside out by our Lord who already knows what we need even before we ask. We are cleansed by the renewing blood of Christ which is poured into us in and through His love for each one of us. His love, in us, drives us out to care for others as He cares for us. Not driven by our own ability, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, we go into a world filled with wickedness and deceit and love others because we were first loved by the Lord. As the Father does with us, so also, we go and simply give His love away. Do not worry about the outcome. The outcome is already known by our Father in heaven. Some scatter the seed, some till the ground, some harvest. Each according to the will of the Father. Our part is to be obedient each day in the love He has given us.

Yes, we wander through this age with ever changing and yet never changing circumstances. People around us are looking for something to hope for. Lost in the insanity of denying the One true God, who alone gives us relevance and hope, those around us seek but never find. Do not try to convince them. Love them. Let the love of Christ which is in you pour out so that others become hungry for the true bread, the living water, the source of life. This is how the love of God first poured into your heart.

We are to learn each and every day how to love the Lord, our God, above all things. In great love, He created all things and He crowned His creation with you and me. He has given us the ability to join in the eternal love which the Father and Son have always had for One another and live in that love here, now, and forever. What love is this that our Lord would lavish us with such a great gift.

"The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone."

Do you hear the loving voice of Your Heavenly Father calling you? Do you hear the voice of your loving Savior calling you? Do you know that the Lord loves you and calls you into His eternal love? Come, arise beloved one of the Lord and live into the love which is yours through this gift of faith which He has given you! Amen.