

**Homily, St. Andrew's
Proper 15C, July 10, 2016
Luke 10:25-37**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

“What do I love when I love my God?” This is the guiding question of theologian John Caputo’s book *On Religion*. It is a combination of 2 related questions that Caputo gets from his self-described hero: 4th century theologian, St. Augustine of Hippo and his famous writing *Confessions*. Augustine asks the question in 2 ways... intellectually and prayerfully: “What do I love when I love God?”; and, “What do I love when I love you, O God?” Caputo combines them and wonders, for almost 150 pages: “What do I love when I love my God?”

Beginning and ending with this question, Caputo defines religion as “the love of God.” He engages in much twisting and turning along the way as he considers his guiding question from every conceivable angle... religion is loving God... but what do I love when I love my God? Early on, for instance, he works on it by trying answer what it is to love by contrasting it with its opposite, writing: “The mark of really loving someone or something is unconditionality and excess, engagement and commitment, fire and passion. Its opposite is a mediocre fellow, neither hot nor cold, moderate to the point of mediocrity.” (5) Moderation as the opposite of loving... it is an interesting thought and a challenging one for we Anglicans for whom the *via media* - the middle way - is so highly valued.

This description of moderation as the opposite of loving could be a good description of the lawyer in our Gospel story today. He asks Jesus two questions... the first about how to obtain eternal life and the second as a clarifying question in relationship to the answer of the first: “Who is my neighbour?” Taken at face value, there is nothing wrong with either question, and indeed we could say that there is much that is *right* about both questions. The whole scene is very agreeable and polite... as one writer describes: “We have two good questions, two good answers and two men who agree. What else could one ask?” (Interpretation, 150) And yet we know intuitively that something is off. There may be good questions, good answers, and lots of agreement... but something just isn’t right. There is more going on that meets the eye. I wonder if Caputo’s reflections about religion being about love marked by unconditionality and excess, engagement and commitment, fire and passion are a good place to start.

The lawyer’s first question in our Gospel story could well be one of such wild love: What must I do to inherit eternal life? Questions of life and death are rarely dispassionate, for they get to the heart of the matter. And yet I wonder if Jesus heard something of mediocrity and moderation in the question, as instead of just answering, he asks in return: What is written in the law? What do you read there? And then the questioner answers his own question: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” It is the correct answer. Jesus says so. And yet the quick answer, the answer that falls easily from the man’s mouth, sounds somehow hollow. Jesus might well have said: “if you already knew the answer... why bother asking?” Whatever might be behind the man’s question, it certainly doesn’t seem to have the engagement and commitment, fire and passion of love. It sounds clinical and moderate... the very opposite of love.

Perhaps after having been reminded of what he already knew: eternal life is about love; religion is about love, the man's next question should then have been: "What do I love when I love my God?" It was not. Instead of wondering about the unconditionality and excess of this love that is eternal... a love that contains within it the abundance of life... instead he looks for the boundaries: "And who is my neighbour?" We hear the mediocrity of a question that seeks to limit and restrict love, a desire to find out the minimum requirement, rather than acting with the excess and passion of love.

Once again, Jesus doesn't answer right away. Instead, he tells a story of a man attacked by robbers; a man hurt and in trouble. A priest passes by without helping; a Levite passes by without helping; and then just when the crowd is tuning out because they already know what will happen next... an Israelite will happen along and become the hero... a Samaritan shows up instead, and turns our expectations on their head. Samaritans are not the heroes... Israelites are! It's like saying the hero is an Oilers or Eskimos' fan... or more seriously: a Muslim. The man before Jesus can't even bring himself to say it when Jesus finally asks: "Which of these three, do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The correct answer, we know, is: the Samaritan. But this educated, respectable man, can't say it even though he knows it... responding instead, "The one who showed him mercy." He can't get the distasteful answer through his lips... but... close enough. His answer is correct.

But Jesus doesn't just leave it at that, just as he didn't leave the first correct answer as the last word. The first time, Jesus acknowledges the lawyer's correct knowledge: "You have given the right answer." And then gets to the heart of the matter: "do this, and you will live." The second time he doesn't even have to say "yes, of course the one who showed mercy is being a neighbour," for the truth of it is obvious to everyone. Instead Jesus repeats the first answer: "Go and do likewise." If religion is about the love of God and the love for God... then practitioners of religion are to be lovers.

The point Jesus highlights is not about the words, but about the way they are lived out. Eternal life is not found in knowing what is written in the law, it is in living it. It's not about knowing the right answer, but doing the right answer. This is essentially the conclusion Caputo comes to as he nears the end of his exploration of religion. After he has deconstructed every idea and every argument, he wonders what is left when all has been undone: "We are not left with nothing," he writes, "but with the passion and the not-knowing. The passion *of* not knowing, truth without Knowledge, the restless heart... We are left a little lost, no doubt about that... doing the truth with all the passion of non-knowing, asking all the more insistently, 'what do I love when I love my God?'" (127)

It has been a difficult week of love, but then it seems that way all too often. The news seems too full of violence and hate that has no end. We hear slogans crying out for justice and peace, for hope, recycled for new tragedies: Black lives matter. Blue lives matter. Muslim lives matter. LGBTQ lives matter. Life matters. In this world of so much darkness and fear and violence, in a world of retribution and revenge, moderation and mediocrity simply will not do. Even if we could figure out the right answers in the complicated matrix of racism and sexism, homophobia and terrorism, religious and just war alike, the right answers are not enough. We wish for the clear resolution of issues and we desire answers to simply be written in the law code. Such desires are understandable but neither will bring about the miracle of peace or healing or reconciliation. It is only through unconditional and sacrificial love... excessive grace...

greater engagement and commitment to root out injustice and face inequality... fire and passion for life... these are the things that come when we reach beyond pat answers and instead risk asking and seeking all the more insistently: what do I love when I love my God?

Like the lawyer questioning Jesus today, we already know the right answers, even to big questions like: What must we do to inherit eternal life? "Love God with all of who you are; and love your neighbour as yourself." We know what is right... we just have to DO it. Correct answers without action to back them up mean little, and so Jesus commands today: "Do this and you shall live."

May we eschew moderation as we respond to human need with loving service. May seek to follow Jesus' command to choose life with fire and passion, with unconditionality and excess, with engagement and commitment. May we love God and love our neighbours beyond the minimum requirements and show great mercy to all we meet on the road.