



ZUMBRO

LUTHERAN CHURCH

You Are Made for Relationship

Pastor Jason Bryan-Weger

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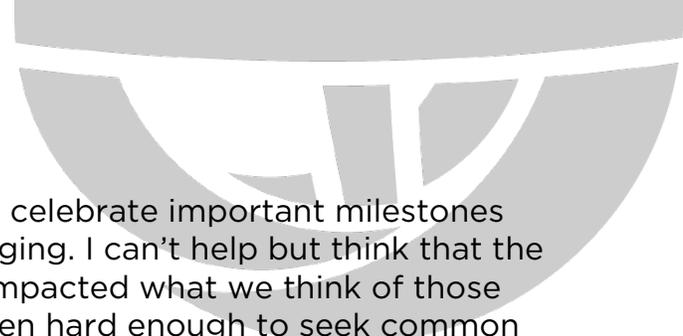
MATTHEW 22:34-40 NSRV

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? ³⁷He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Thank God it's summer! Is anyone else feeling this way? And particularly THIS summer. After so many months of delaying the joy of actually being together with real live three-dimensional people, this summer is feeling really different than last year. How many times have you gotten together with people you haven't seen in nearly a year and said, "I can't believe we are actually doing this! It's great!"

This week I met with Jackie and Erik Hasselquist. They are finally doing something that they didn't think would happen. Jackie grew up at Zumbro as part of the O'Reilly family. She and Erik were engaged in 2019 and shortly after their engagement, they started planning a wedding for 2020. As COVID hit harder and things became less certain, they tried to be adaptable. They changed the wedding date multiple times. They reduced the guest list multiple times. They changed the location multiple times, eventually making the decision to get married in Erik's parent's backyard with about 20 people present. And though the ceremony and the intimate gathering was holy and beautiful in its own right, it certainly wasn't what they hoped for. People they cared deeply about were not there to share in this important day in their lives. Finally, this summer they are planning to renew their wedding vows and invite as many people as possible, because relationships should be celebrated.

The last year and a half has given us plenty of experiences of feeling a void in relationships to the people we love. And though we've felt it deeply at times, I wonder if we're only now starting to be able to fully realize what has been missing. The void in casual contact with acquaintances, the lack of ability to meet new people with different perspectives, or time to invest in friendships outside



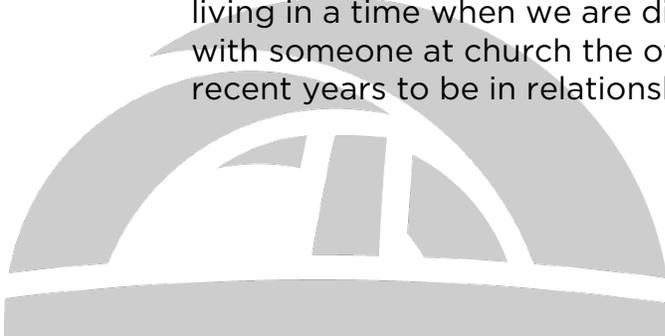
our immediate bubble, and the lack of ability to celebrate important milestones have all impacted our sense of being and belonging. I can't help but think that the reduced contact with one another has further impacted what we think of those who have different perspectives than us. It's been hard enough to seek common ground in recent years. And a global pandemic, that caused a physical chasm between people has likely contributed to the ideological chasm that has emerged as well.

One of the books I come back to frequently is called *Turning to One Another*, by Margaret Wheatley. Wheatley is a social scientist and organizational expert. She focuses on ways people are the solution to the world's largest challenges, not the problem. To some, this idea could seem revolutionary. The book reads like a personal journal, as well as a workbook that calls readers to reflect on our deepest beliefs about the human experience. When I am ready to give up on humanity - and let's face it, there are plenty of reasons any of us might want to do that these days - I tend to open this book to be reminded that at the heart of our very existence is relationships. And that the willingness to give up on people may very well be the root of some of our most troubling problems in the world. In one part of the book, Wheatley says, "Relationships are all there is. Everything in the universe only exists because it is in relationship to everything else. Nothing exists in isolation. We have to stop pretending we are individuals who can go it alone."

This isn't just sage sociological advice. It's spiritual and biblical. In the very beginning of creation, God is going about the work of creating everything. It's almost all finished. All seems good, very good. But then God looks at the man, the Adamah, in Hebrew. And God sees that although the man is surrounded by every living thing, as beautiful and beneficial as it all is, that it is still not good that man should be alone. So, God creates woman, a partner, a companion. One who can understand and be understood, and who completes the fullness of humanity. You see, creation is not complete without relationship. God never intended for us to go it alone.

Let me add this, we often think of Adam and Eve primarily as a marriage relationship, but I'd invite us to expand our view of Adam and Eve beyond that. Look at the fundamental gift God provides for all of us in this image, and the call God give us to be in relationship with people; whether we are single, married, partnered, child, adult, divorced, or widowed, straight or queer. God has made you for relationship. It's in turning toward one another that we are fully human.

Yet relationships are messy. Keeping this call to turn toward one another in front of us is not always easy and seems to get more difficult by the week. We are living in a time when we are divided along all kinds of fracture lines. I was talking with someone at church the other day who was telling me how hard it has been in recent years to be in relationship with her siblings because of differing views on





all kinds of things. It's heartbreaking to see relationships between family and friends breakdown, to see the priority of relationships sidelined because of intolerance for different ideas. When family gatherings and community events carry an air of dread rather than joy, that's not good for anyone. As I mentioned, this call to be in relationship is a spiritual matter – it is fundamental to who we are as human beings. We are made for relationships.

When the religious leaders and lawyers of the Temple sought to trip up Jesus with a religious litmus test, it's not a surprise that Jesus sidesteps their game again and again. The religious types wanted to make the discussion about the abstract. They asked him questions about things that were unknown through human experience like whose wife is the remarried widow in heaven. They sought to catch Jesus on a theological technicality, but Jesus wouldn't go there. Finally, a religious lawyer strikes with a big question. "Teacher," the lawyer asked, "which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus goes to something we all can understand. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Essentially, Jesus is saying, "you want to know what it means to be human and to be a follower of God? Love God. Love people. These two types of relationships are all there is." St. Augustine wrote, "for when there is a question as to whether man is good, one does not ask what he believes, or what he hopes, but what he loves."

Jesus affirms and accents God's intent for loving relationships to be at the heart of our existence. We will not be judged by how much we have or how pure our politics or ideas were, but on what and how we love. We are made for relationship, as messy and difficult as they are at times. It is really all there is. Love. Love for God. Love for neighbor. Everything else is secondary.

The good news is the love we have is not abstract. It does not have to be conjured up out of nothing or summoned out of our own experience alone. Love flows from the endless source that is God, who is revealed in Jesus the Christ. This source of love is perfect. It casts out all fear. It makes the impossible possible. God's love has the power to mend what is broken, to strengthen what is weak, to find that which is lost. God's love has the power to draw us back together after isolation and exile. When we grasp this kind of love, when we let that love for us, God's love for us, which comes without condition or qualification seep down deep into our hearts, that same love has nowhere to go but out into the world through us. A world where too often people turn away from one another rather than toward one another. Jesus' calls us to another way, a way where life is lived together and where God's love transforms the world. Amen.

