

I have often wondered what it means to love God. The first and greatest commandment is to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind, all of ourselves.

Sally McFague, a theologian, helped clarify this for me when she said

..... we are not called to love God or the world.

Rather, we are called to love God in the world.

We love God by loving the world.

*We love God **through** and **with** the world.*

Isaiah puts it this way:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me,

... the LORD has anointed me.....

- *to bring good news to the poor.*
- *to comfort the broken-hearted*
- *to proclaim that captives will be released
and prisoners will be freed.*
- *to tell those who mourn
that the time of the LORD's favour has come.*

God is **not** an object that we can see and feel and touch – hence the second commandment: **Do not** *make an idol of anything.*

Rather,

God is *active, creative love at work in the entire universe.*

Love gives, full measure, pressed down and overflowing. For people who have fallen in love, there is **nothing** they wouldn't do, or wouldn't give to the beloved other!

God does that. God gives and gives and gives. And we find this supremely in Jesus. Jesus came so that we could see – with our very own eyes – what God is like.

God is

- the energy that created our beautiful world

How can I reflect God's love here, today?

Christians speak about *imitating Christ* – which means

*we were made by God to become like God,
loving all others,
loving universally.* Sallie McFague

The Ten Commandments are pivotal. Martin Luther says the commandments do tell us what **not** to do. But, more positively, *We **should** fear and love God so that we do not murder, commit adultery, steal, or bear false witness.*

Our love of God should motivate us to

- *help and support [our neighbours] in all of life's needs;*
- *to lead pure and decent lives in word and deed,*
- *and each of us loves and honours his or her spouse;*
- *to help [our neighbours] to improve and protect their property and income;*
- *to come to [our neighbours'] defence, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light"* (quotes from The Book of Concord, "The Small Catechism," Kolb & Wengert).

In other words, be positive, build up the other person especially when speaking of them to others. Ditch the negative and the

critical! God does not criticise our efforts, condemn us, or ostracise us!

If we live in God, we live in love and we act as God does.

In loving the world, and loving our neighbours, we participate in God.

Our world is facing many crises. Two of the most immediate are:
climate change and **unjust financial distribution**.

In the extraordinary nature documentary series, *The Blue Planet*, we see the diversity and extraordinary creativity of God in this beautiful world in which we live.

- What have we done with it?
- How can we do things differently?

We know many of the answers that we, individuals, families and communities can do.....

but are we doing them?

Environmentally friendly household products, not using toxic poisons in our gardens and on the land, shunning the use of plastic – think of something as simple as using paper straws instead of plastic straws, as people are doing in Salcombe.

We are exposed uncomfortably regularly to
people who are starving,
who are freezing cold,
who have no access to medicine.

How are we helping – pouring ourselves out, to enable others to flourish?
We speak in the Church of England of '*mutual flourishing*' as one of the

five guiding principles for women and men in ministry, but what about enabling the hungry, the poor, the forgotten ones to flourish?

What does it mean for me to 'empty' myself for others?

I ask myself:

- can I forego a meal, or meals so that the money saved can feed someone else.
- do I need to buy that new item of clothing?

Someone wrote it like this:

The new model of the universal self operates at both the personal and public levels, for instance, in the planetary house rules:

- *take only your share;*
- *clean up after yourself;*
- *keep the house in good repair for those who will use it after you.*

*. . . [I]f one understands God to be not a 'substance' but the active, creative love at work in the entire universe, then 'loving God' is **not something in addition** to loving the world, but is rather the acknowledgement that in loving the world, one is participating in the planetary process of self-emptying love at all levels....*

***All** can participate in loving neighbour, a process in which God's own self may also be seen at work.*

Everything is interdependent – people, plants, animals, land, sea, air. We need one another. And it is foolishness to think I can do it my way. We can't.

John the Baptist was sent by God, as part of God's plan, to fulfil God's purposes. Jesus makes us part of the same plan. He says to you and to me: *Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*

We are part of God's continuing plan of salvation for the world. We are ...signs that are to point the world to Jesus, and through Jesus to the Father, the one who is love. (Brian Stoffregen)

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How are we fulfilling God's purposes?

Reference:

Sallie McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint* (Fortress Press: 2013), xii-xiv. quoted in Richard Rohr, *Daily Meditations*
Brian Stoffregen, www.crossmarks.com