

# ***Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor***

***February 5, 2023***

***Lesson 10***

**Title: Loving as God Loves**

**Texts: Ruth 4:9-10; 1 John 4:7-21**

The answer is 27. The question is: How many times in this text from 1 John does some form of the word “love” appear? Many students of the Bible are familiar with the Greek word *agapē*. All 27 uses of “love words” are some form of *agapē*. This is the self-giving love seen in God. This is the caring initiative seen in God. This is the undeserved acceptance seen in God. This is the sacrificial willingness seen in God. And we are called upon to love in the same way.

As Robert W. Wall has said in *The CEB Study Bible*, “God is the source and example of true love.”

The Old Testament Book of Ruth shows love that jumps across ethnic lines. The Hebrew Boaz cared for the Moabite Ruth. He knew how “to work the system” (Ruth 4:6-8) and got to claim her (verse 10). Then, the people who heard Boaz’s acceptance of Ruth celebrated and offered their blessing (verse 13). Out of their marriage came a son (Obed), who became the grandfather of David (verses 17, 22). Out of the line of David came the Savior (Matthew 1:5-16). A little love goes a long way!

It is one thing to translate *agapē* into English; it is quite another thing to translate *agapē* into the 21st Century! I keep looking through these verses from 1 John, trying to find the clause that lets me make an exception on whom I love. The closest “escape clause” I can find is in verse 20. In that verse, I determine that if I am willing to be called “a liar” before God, then I can pick and choose whom I shall love. That’s not much of an option.

Loving someone does not mean that I agree with them. Loving someone does not mean that I admire them. Loving someone does not mean that I want to be like them. Think back over all the people Jesus met. Did he agree with them all? Did he admire all of them? Did he want to be like all of them? Of course not! Did he love all of them? Yes! Yes! Yes!

When Jesus was asked to give an example of how to love a neighbor (Luke 10:25-37), he told a story about a Samaritan who helped a man who had been beaten up by robbers. (I think it is interesting that we call that story “the *Good Samaritan*,” as if we assume other Samaritans are bad.) But, in the story, love does not come from the people we expect to be caring (priest, verse 31; Levite, verse 32). Love comes from an outsider. I am left to wonder: “Who is trying to love me?”

**Prayer:** As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “God of love, help me to love...”

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