

What Do You Love Most?

- What love most? What aspect/activities of life bring you most joy, most fulfilling for you? Some love spending time with children, grands, home or vaca. Others love getting together with parents, sibs, fam reunions. Sometimes it's activities with loved ones – sporting events, baseball tournaments, time up north, traveling, sightseeing. Other times it's quiet time at home, maybe with book, in family room, out in garden. There are all kinds of things that bring us joy, fulfillment; things we love about life. And usually those things done with people we love most: spouse, children, parents, maybe dear friend. But what you love *most*? When you think re that, forces you to reevaluate priorities, because lot of things we have, like, even love. But what could we not live without; what really need; what really is most important in life?
- This week we all have been forced to wrestle with those questions. With rivers cresting at record highs; with Burl's bridges shut down, city cut in half; with most of city without power for either hours or days; with so much damage (for some, catastrophic damage that assessors only beginning to realize); with Burlington dumpsters now filled with everything from wet drywall/carpet, to rotten refrigerator food, to family heirlooms, precious photos, irreplaceable keepsakes; and not just in our community but in surrounding coms, as well – we've been forced to ask, reevaluate: What really most imp in life? What could not live without? What need? What do I love most?
- Jesus challenges us to ask ourselves those questions when says **vs. 34-36**. What mean? Of course came bring peace: through forgiveness of sins, promise of eternal life in heaven for all who trust in him as their Savior. Problem is: not everyone trusts, even within some families. I have many in my extended family that are unbelievers; maybe you do, too. For families like these, Jesus is source of division, sword. So true believers in divided households/families have to ask themselves, what do I love most? **Vs. 37**. Hard words. But what Jesus saying: not that we should hate family (obviously not!), but that there can be nothing (at all!) more important to us than Jesus – not even family. Jesus calls on us to be so committed to him that nothing else is more important to us.
- This is **1st Com; expl.** “Above all things” makes think award pedestal, like in Olympics. Tallest pedestal for 1st place gold medal winner. Jesus demands that spot in our hearts; it should be reserved only for him; nothing else to take his place. And whenever anything else does rise above Jesus in our hearts, that becomes our idol. Think First Lesson, where Israelites, Egypt, Red Sea; Moses on Mt. Sinai; golden calf. That was idolatry. We may think we'd never bow down to gold statue. But anytime anything else becomes more important to us than Jesus, that breaks 1st Com; that's idolatry.
- Second Lesson, little short reading from 1 Jn, sums it up well: **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 Jn 2:15-16)**. So today we sing, *“What is the world to me! My Jesus is my treasure” (CW 477:4)*. *“Take the world, but give me Jesus. In his cross my trust shall be” (CW 355:3)*. Now, following Jesus with this kind of concentrated commitment does mean bearing a cross; **vs. 38**. But also says **vs. 39**. IOW, when you learn to relegate everything else in your life to a #2 position, and keep Christ on top pedestal, then find true Christian contentment in your life of faith.
- Now, we're not always very good at that! More idols than we can count, whether: family members, vacations, baseball tournaments, whatever. Plenty of things creep their way onto that top pedestal in our hearts. But thank God that Christ put us on top pedestal in his heart. He made saving us his #1 priority; nothing would deter him. Christ was perfectly committed to us. He willingly offered himself to unspeakable sufferings; he took up his cross, shed his blood, gave his life to bring us forgiveness, eternal life. And through his death, res God completely forgives us when we misplace our priorities, knock Jesus off top spot. What did Jesus love most? Loved, loves *us* most.

- So I ask you: what you love most? Did you lose something you love in this torrential flooding, something damaged beyond repair in waterlogged basement? Did you throw away things precious to you? Many of us did; many people in our sister WELS congs did (Peace, Wilmot cancelled church, flooded out; First LG has ruined sacristy; we just lost power, had little water come in back door); many in our community had to throw things away; many in surrounding communities tossed things, too. The damage done with this week's flooding has been catastrophic.
- And I in no way want to minimize the impact of the devastation we've sustained. But what happens when you lose things, when stuff is destroyed, even when people are taken from you (thank God – no deaths reported in whole ordeal!)? But what happens when you lose what you love? I think you reprioritize! You thank God for what was not lost; but praise God for what can never be taken from you – your salvation secured by Christ, written in heaven, through death/res of God's only begotten Son, who loves you so much that sometimes he even reduces you in order to strengthen you and draw you closer to himself. If you suffered loss through these floods, remember what your Savior says, **“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you... For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Is 43:1-3).** When disaster hits close to home, Jesus draws us closer to himself. He helps us to see what's imp, and what's *most* imp; to distinguish between what we love, and what love most.
- What do you love most? *“Lord, you I love with all my heart!” (CW 434:1).* May the Lord be with and bless all who have suffered this week. And may he *“pour into our hearts such love for [him] that, loving [him] above all things, we may obtain [his] promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Prayer of the Day, Pentecost 6).* Amen.

Matthew 10:43-42

³⁴ “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn “ ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— ³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.’

³⁷ “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰ “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”