

# FROM THE DESK OF BISHOP MAAS

## LOVE



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### Love

The old song says that love “is a many-splendored thing,” and indeed it is in all the ways the song means—romantic, thrilling, gratifying. I’m a big fan of the love of that song—and of the love of Hallmark cards and flowers and candy. I’m no Valentine’s Day Scrooge.

I am however someone who throws the word love around sparingly, because I know the many other things it means. Love is also a painful, vulnerable, costly thing. For that, I mostly blame Jesus. He’s the one who said things like, “love one another,” “love your neighbor,” even “love your enemy.” But Luther is a challenger too. He’s the one who said we have a vocation, a holy calling, to love our spouse, our child, our siblings, our parents, our family—all of which bring their own hurdles and hangups.

We have chosen the theme of “love” for this month not because of Valentine’s Day but because we recognize how needful we are of this love. It’s Black History Month, which calls us to be mindful of injustices past and present that linger because our love is too small to recognize that they exist and that we have a role in eliminating them—not least because we too often play a role in sustaining them. This month also marks the start of Year 3 of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we recognize how the fatigue of this seemingly perpetual plague has tried our love and too often made us act lovelessly—there is no grace in the conflicts that have arisen in too many congregations over pandemic-related matters. This month also takes us to the doorstep of Lent, that great reminder of what love truly looks like.

This is where and why I'm able to continue to strive to love in spite of my repeatedly falling short of fully doing so. Loving completely is too hard, until I recall the love that God has shown for me, even for me, in the person and example and death of his only Son. As a parent, this is a love beyond my imagining. But it's the means God has chosen to let us—all of humanity—know how deep God's love is for each of us. So in wonder I turn back around and try to love again, even when it means vulnerability, humility, apology—and perhaps most difficult, changing my behavior.

So love one another, love your family, love your neighbor, love your enemies; not as you ought but as you are able, because there is one whose love for you defies description, and whose grace frees you from all of the mistakes you will inevitably make in striving to live that love.

For love is far more than a many-splendored thing. It's exactly what that other old song (from Bible school days) says: "love, love, love; that's what it's all about."