



THE CELEBRATION AND BLESSING OF MARRIAGE

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH IN SOMERVILLE

A PARISH OF THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF NEW JERSEY

158 West High Street, Somerville, NJ 08876

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Holy Matrimony at St. John's Church

Congratulations! You have made one of the great decisions of life, the decision to marry. May you become one in heart and soul and live in fidelity and peace. In marriage, two people commit themselves to a lifelong union "or the purpose of mutual fellowship, encouragement and understanding, for the procreation, if it may be, of children and their physical and spiritual nurture." Marriage is a sacrament administered to one another by the couple; it is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. The sacramental nature of marriage involves infinitely more than the wedding ceremony with which it is solemnized. "Therefore, marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God."

"In the Episcopal Church it is required that one, at least, of the parties must be a baptized Christian; that the ceremony be attested by at least two witnesses; and that the marriage conform to the laws of the State and the canons of this Church."
(Book of Common Prayer, page 422)

The Episcopal Church is not in the wedding business. The Church is concerned that the sacrament of Holy Matrimony be administered faithfully and reverently. Couples applying to be married in this Church are understood to be seeking the fullness of the sacrament in the blessing of the Church on their marriage. It is expected that their attitude and participation will be in accordance with this understanding and that they have an active connection with St. John's worship and ministry.

The time of preparation for a marriage is a time to reflect upon the direction of a couple's lives, a time anticipating new beginnings, a time to talk seriously about the practical matters of married life in the context of Christian faith and practice. At least three counseling sessions with the officiating priest are required prior to the ceremony. The priest may require additional sessions. The material you have received with this document will help you accomplish a thorough and meaningful preparation for a successful marriage.

Though canon law requires that the intention of a couple to marry be communicated to the priest at least thirty days before the ceremony, proper preparation usually requires at least three months. Still more time must be allowed when a prior marriage has ended in divorce as an application for the consent of the Diocesan Bishop for remarriage must be filed and considered by him or her. It is a priest's duty to refuse to officiate when, in his or her judgment, a couple does not intend to, or is unable to enter the lifelong union of Holy Matrimony demonstrating the

“heart, mind and will to accomplish this union” and proposing “to seek the help of God thereto.”

Any couple planning a marriage at St. John’s is welcome to and is encouraged to consult one of the clergy at the earliest possible time. As always, if the Parish Office or I can be of any assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact us.

May the Peace of the Lord be always with you.

Warmly and faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Ron Pollock". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "F" and a prominent "P".

Fr. Ron Pollock
Rector

Theological Reflection on Covenantal Relationship: Spiritual Practice for Same-Sex Couples

Christian Life and Covenants

All Christians are called to bear witness to the good news of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are empowered for such witness by our covenantal relationship with God.

Baptism initiates us into that covenant, making us Christ's own forever and members of Christ's Body, the Church. The eucharist sustains us in that covenantal life and strengthens us to be Christ's witnesses in the world.

Our covenantal life with God is expressed in relationships of commitment and faithfulness, including those of same-sex couples. It is the Church's joy to celebrate these relationships as signs of God's love, to pray for God's grace to support couples in their life together, and to join with these couples in our shared witness to the gospel in the world.

Themes for Theological Reflection and Spiritual Practice

A sacramental framework for covenantal relationships offers a way to reflect on the grace of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of faithful, committed couples. Several theological themes can assist couples as they consider their covenantal vows as a form of spiritual practice:

- **Vocation:** God calls people into various kinds of relationship, whether as single people, in monastic communities, or as intimate couples. These vocational callings can empower our witness to the gospel. The decision to enter into a covenantal union is a vocation marked by these characteristics: "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God."
- **Households:** Covenantal relationships are often lived in households in which we practice daily the giving of ourselves for the good of another. While households take many different forms, they create a space of mutual trust and accountability. The joy, intimacy, and shared vulnerability of households can thus help us learn the spiritual disciplines of compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation in lives of committed monogamy and fidelity.
- **Fruitfulness:** The divine grace that sustains a covenantal relationship bears fruit in countless ways, not only for the couple but for the wider community as well. Covenanted couples manifest this grace in their

shared gifts for ministry and in lives of service, generosity, and hospitality.

- ***Mutual Blessing:*** A blessed relationship is set apart for a divine purpose: to bear witness to the creating, redeeming, and sanctifying love of God in the world. As the Spirit empowers the couple for this witness, the Church is likewise blessed and strengthened for its mission and ministry.

In all of these ways and more, the blessing of a same-sex relationship invites the couple and the whole Church to renew our commitment to the Baptismal Covenant. That commitment is expressed by faith in the good news of Jesus Christ, in the hope for union with God that Christ promised, and with the love that knits us together as the Body of Christ. As the apostle Paul says, we live our life together as God's people with faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love. (*1 Corinthians 13:13*).

SUGGESTED READINGS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis 1:26-28—*Male and female he created them*

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Genesis 2:4-9, 15-24—*A man cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh*

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.... The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Song of Solomon 2:10-13; 8:6-7—*Many waters cannot quench love*

My beloved speaks and says to me: “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away....Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.

Ruth 1:16-17—*Where you go, I shall go*

Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!”

1 Samuel 18:1b, 3, 20:16-17, 42a—*For he loved him as he loved his own life*

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.... Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul....Thus Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the Lord seek out the enemies of David.” Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him; for he loved him as he loved his own life....Then Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, for ever.’” He got up and left; and Jonathan went into the city.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12—*Two are better than one*

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Micah 4:1-4—*Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord*

In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong

nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

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PSALMS

Psalm 65

BCP, page 723

You are to be praised, O God, in Zion;
to you shall vows be performed in Jerusalem.
To you that hear prayer shall all flesh come,
because of their transgressions.
Our sins are stronger than we are,
but you will blot them out.
Happy are they whom you choose and draw to your courts to dwell there!
they will be satisfied by the beauty of your house,
by the holiness of your temple.
Awesome things will you show us in your righteousness, O God of our salvation,
O Hope of all the ends of the earth and of the seas that are far away.
You make fast the mountains by your power;
they are girded about with might.
You still the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves, and the clamor of the peoples.
Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvelous signs;
you make the dawn and the dusk to sing for joy.
You visit the earth and water it abundantly; you make it very plenteous;
the river of God is full of water.
You prepare the grain,
for so you provide for the earth.
You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges;
with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase.
You crown the year with your goodness,
and your paths overflow with plenty.

May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing,
and the hills be clothed with joy.
May the meadows cover themselves with flocks,
and the valleys cloak themselves with grain;
let them shout for joy and sing.

Psalm 67

BCP, page 675

May God be merciful to us and bless us,
show us the light of his countenance and come to us.
Let your ways be known upon earth,
your saving health among all nations.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide all the nations upon earth.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.
The earth has brought forth her increase;
may God, our own God, give us his blessing.
May God give us his blessing,
and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe of him.

Psalm 85:7-13

BCP, page 709

Show us your mercy, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.
I will listen to what the Lord God is saying,
for he is speaking peace to his faithful people
and to those who turn their hearts to him.
Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.
Mercy and truth have met together;
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
Truth shall spring up from the earth,
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.
The Lord will indeed grant prosperity,
and our land will yield its increase.
Righteousness shall go before him,
and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

Psalm 98*BCP, page 727*

Sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvelous things.
With his right hand and his holy arm
has he won for himself the victory.
The Lord has made known his victory;
his righteousness has he openly shown in the sight of the nations.
He remembers his mercy and faithfulness to the house of Israel,
and all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.
Shout with joy to the Lord, all you lands;
lift up your voice, rejoice, and sing.
Sing to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the voice of song.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
shout with joy before the King, the Lord.
Let the sea make a noise and all that is in it,
the lands and those who dwell therein.
Let the rivers clap their hands,
and let the hills ring out with joy before the Lord,
when he comes to judge the earth.
In righteousness shall he judge the world
and the peoples with equity..

Psalm 100*BCP, page 729*

Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands;
serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song.
Know this: The Lord himself is God;
he himself has made us, and we are his;
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and call upon his Name.
For the Lord is good;
his mercy is everlasting;

Psalm 126*BCP, page 782*

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
then were we like those who dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy.

Then they said among the nations,
 "The Lord has done great things for them."
The Lord has done great things for us,
 and we are glad indeed.
Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
 like the watercourses of the Negev.
Those who sowed with tears
 will reap with songs of joy.
Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed,
 will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

Psalm 127

BCP, page 782

Unless the Lord builds the house,
 their labor is in vain who build it.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
 in vain the watchman keeps his vigil.
It is in vain that you rise so early and go to bed so late;
 vain, too, to eat the bread of toil, for he gives to his beloved sleep.
Children are a heritage from the Lord,
 and the fruit of the womb is a gift.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
 are the children of one's youth.
Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them!
 he shall not be put to shame when he contends with his enemies in the gate.

Psalm 128

BCP, page 783

Happy are they all who fear the Lord,
 and who follow in his ways!
You shall eat the fruit of your labor;
 happiness and prosperity shall be yours.
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house,
 your children like olive shoots round about your table.
The man who fears the Lord
 shall thus indeed be blessed.
The Lord bless you from Zion,
 and may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.
May you live to see your children's children;
 may peace be upon Israel.

Psalm 133*BCP, page 787*

Oh, how good and pleasant it is,
 when brethren live together in unity!
It is like fine oil upon the head
 that runs down upon the beard,
Upon the beard of Aaron,
 and runs down upon the collar of his robe.
It is like the dew of Hermon
 that falls upon the hills of Zion.
For there the Lord has ordained the blessing:
 life for evermore.

Psalm 148*BCP, page 805*

Hallelujah!
Praise the Lord from the heavens;
 praise him in the heights.
Praise him, all you angels of his;
 praise him, all his host.
Praise him, sun and moon;
 praise him, all you shining stars.
Praise him, heaven of heavens,
 and you waters above the heavens.
Let them praise the Name of the Lord;
 for he commanded, and they were created.
He made them stand fast for ever and ever;
 he gave them a law which shall not pass away.
Praise the Lord from the earth,
 you sea-monsters and all deeps;
Fire and hail, snow and fog,
 tempestuous wind, doing his will;
Mountains and all hills,
 fruit trees and all cedars;
Wild beasts and all cattle,
 creeping things and wingèd birds;
Kings of the earth and all peoples,
 princes and all rulers of the world;
Young men and maidens,
 old and young together.

Let them praise the Name of the Lord,
for his Name only is exalted,
his splendor is over earth and heaven.
He has raised up strength for his people
and praise for all his loyal servants,
the children of Israel, a people who are near him.
Hallelujah!

Psalm 149:1-5

BCP, page 807

Hallelujah!
Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing his praise in the congregation of the faithful.
Let Israel rejoice in his Maker;
let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.
Let them praise his Name in the dance;
let them sing praise to him with timbrel and harp.
For the Lord takes pleasure in his people
and adorns the poor with victory.
Let the faithful rejoice in triumph;
let them be joyful on their beds.

NEW TESTAMENT

Romans 12:9-18—*Live in harmony with one another*

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

1 Corinthians [12:31b-], 13:13—*The greatest of these is love*

[Strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.] If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not

envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20— *So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation*

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Galatians 5:14, 22-26— *If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.*

For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ... By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

Ephesians 3:14-21— *The Father from whom every family is named*

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Colossians 3:12-17—*Love which binds everything together in harmony*

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

1 John 3:18-24—*We should love one another as Jesus loves us*

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

1 John 4:7-16, 21—*Let us love one another for love is of God*

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them....The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

GOSPEL READINGS

Matthew 5:1-16—*The Beatitudes*

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Mark 12:28-34—*The Great Commandment*

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that [Jesus] answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,' —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Luke 6:32-38—*Be merciful as your Father is merciful*

[Jesus said] "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your

reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

John 15:9-17 — *Abide in my love*

[Jesus said] "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

John 17:1-2, 18-26 — *Jesus' prayer for his disciples*

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him....As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Hymn Suggestions

The Hymnal 1982

- 350 O God of love, to thee we bow
351 May the grace of Christ our Savior
352 O God, to those who here profess
353 Your love, O God, has called us here
390 Praise to the Lord
396/397 Now thank we all our God
400 All creatures of our God and King
432 O praise ye the Lord
538 God of mercy, God of grace
657 Love divine, all loves excelling

Hymn Suggestions

Lift Every Voice and Sing II

- 67 I love the Lord
70 I want Jesus to walk with me
72 Just a closer walk with thee
111 Come, thou fount of every blessing
119 Spirit of God, descend upon my heart
184 Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
189 Great is thy faithfulness
191 His eye is on the sparrow
194 Lead me, guide me
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