

# Love Is The Answer

John 13:34-35

First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, IL

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Matt Matthews

*John 13:34-35                      I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

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When I was a teenager, Todd Rundgren wrote a song for his band Utopia called "Love is the Answer." He recorded it (in 1977) for their album "Oops, Wrong Planet." The song was covered a few years later (1979) by England Dan & John Ford Coley and became a big hit (1979).

The Beach Boys, Elton John, the Beatles, Billy Joel, my sisters' Simon and Garfunkel, my parents' Sinatra and Lettermen, and every other band on the radio was singing about love. All you need is love, they said. And I was a believer. I was a believer because the choir at my church was singing about love. My preacher was preaching about love. My Sunday school teachers were teaching about love. My parents were demonstrating love.

The chorus of "Love Is the Answer" is a prayer:

*Light of the world, shine on me  
Love is the answer  
Shine on us all, set us free  
Love is the answer*

As a child and teen, everyone I loved led me to believe that the best example of love was not some rock star but this dude named Jesus.

"I give you a new commandment," Jesus said, "that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." He says this on the night when he got up from the table, wrapped a towel around his waist, and proceeded to get on his hands and knees and wash his disciples' feet.

With these words, yes, but most importantly by this act, he teaches us that:

Love is service.

Love is humility.

Love is sacrifice.

We love with gladness.

We love with our whole hearts.

We love on our knees.

Jesus loved even though he was derided, tempted to do otherwise, taunted, tricked, spat upon, jeered, crucified.

He said long before any song writer ever said it: *Love is the answer.*

And, amazingly, he invites us to love like this.

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Tae Chong tells this story from the television program "Stories from the Stage" (episode 19, season 5). As he became a young man, "Lonliness became part of my tradition."

Tae lives in Portland, Maine. He was born in Korea. His parents and brothers immigrated to the US in 1976. He was always expected to marry a Korean woman. But there were only 4 in the Portland, Maine, community.

His older brother fell in love with an Italian. His father disallowed the relationship. Father and son split.

Tae resigned himself to estrangement from his family. He went to college; he moved out. He lost contact with his folks. He drifted away. When he was 28, he fell in love with a blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl with a big smile. Because tradition was important to her, Susan wanted to meet Tae's family. Tae explained that his parent's tradition would not accept her. Tae explained that his parents' tradition would not welcome her, could not welcome her.

Susan persisted.

He called his mother. His mother invited him for dinner and said she'd make ox-tail soup. Tae explained that Susan was a vegetarian and she couldn't eat meat. Mother insisted they come.

That night, was a night of broken traditions.

Tae broke his tradition of not coming home.

Susan broke her tradition of not eating meat.

And Tae's parents broke their tradition of not welcoming a blue-eyed, blonde-haired, future daughter-in-law over for dinner.<sup>[1]</sup>

That night, love prevailed.

They all learned that *love is the answer.*

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Jesus summarizes the law with his great commandment: love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is the greatest commandment, he says. And the second greatest is like the first: Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Love is the answer.

But sometimes love is hard.

Shaun Billman is the teacher of the week at Mary Miller Junior High School in Georgetown. As I read about him in the paper last Thursday, I was delighted. Teaching is a difficult job. Teaching math to sixth graders must be particularly challenging. But he loves his job, and the delight, humor, and commitment he brings to the classroom is inspiring. His favorite lesson is teaching students to solve one-step algebra equations and finding the area of quadrilaterals and triangles. He doesn't want his students to rely on technology alone; he wants them to use their own personal computer—their brain. (Thursday, May 12, 2022, *The News-Gazette*, p. B1).

Shaun Billman puts the walk in the talk. Love is the answer. Our children—our world—needs people like Mr. Billman.

Jesus calls us into a vocation of loving—loving God, self, and world. Jesus calls us (as he makes clear on the sermon on the plain, Luke 6:27ff) not just to love the ones who love us—the grandmothers and aunts and old family friends. Jesus calls us to love everybody. Even antsy sixth graders who might sometimes be hard to love. Even the people who are different, people who don't share our morals, our customs, our traditions. Love everybody, Jesus says. Even our enemy.

**(Later, Jesus gives a clue about loving: He calls it abiding in his love. We dwell with it, in it.)**

May God bless us as we try to love, as we make the changes necessary to love others, as we take the necessary extra time, make the necessary extra effort, overcome the obstacles and traditions that drive us apart.

*And when you feel afraid  
Love one another  
When you've lost your way  
Love one another  
And when you're all alone  
Love one another  
And when you're far from home  
Love one another  
And when you're down and out  
Love one another  
And when your hopes run out  
Love one another  
And when you need a friend  
Love one another  
And when you're near the end  
Love one another*

Jesus says, Love is the answer.

Might we trust him.

Might we follow him.

AMEN.

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://worldchannel.org/episode/stories-from-the-stage-match-made/>

