

Psalm 66:8-20  
John 14:15-21  
Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Irene Pak Lee  
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## Impossible Sticky Love

A few weeks ago, I gathered with 15 Korean American Presbyterian Clergywomen at Zephyr Point Lake Tahoe. It has been several years since we have gathered in-person for our annual conferences and retreats, so it was wonderful to be together again. I've been part of this organization for 20 years now and it's been such an important sisterhood for me. I had never seen anyone who looked like me in ministry until I went to seminary and was introduced to this group of intergenerational women in ministry: immigrants, 1.5 and second generation Korean Clergywomen. Representation matters, and seeing them and hearing their stories as leaders in the church was critical and formative for me as a new seminarian.

This year, the theme for the conference was "Jeong." Now, as I attempt to explain to you all what jeong is this morning, I want to preface it by saying that even Korean and Korean Americans do not know quite how to fully define or describe what jeong is. There is another important aspect of Korean culture that's more talked and written about in academic circles called "han" which would be described as a physical and visceral response to systemic oppression that all Koreans feel and have and would claim comes from their long history of colonization. It's a deep embodied sorrow and lament. There are theologians who talk about han and write vastly about this topic. But what is less known about Koreans is the concept of jeong. Professor and academic Sue Kim Park would define jeong as the other side of the same coin as han. An "affection and love so deep and all encompassing that it has the liberative power to heal, release, and unravel han." She continues that both "jeong and han have the potential to be stable and volatile simultaneously."

So jeong is similar to what we might understand as compassion and love and leads to a kind of solidarity among people. The other important aspect of jeong that I would share is that it is not passive. Jeong moves people to action so that it is not love as merely a feeling but a guide to movement.

Now if you're listening and you're like, "I still have no idea what you're trying to describe, Irene," you are right to feel that way. As we heard from conference leaders who spoke and engaged us on the topic, we all realized that it is really hard to describe jeong even in our own lives, even as we get what it is. It's just something you know-something that stems sometimes from within...sometimes from

obedience, doing what you're supposed to do, but one leader described jeong as "sticky love."

This analogy stood out to me because I hate it when things are sticky. I really want to wash my hands quickly or wipe the stickiness off of my children's hands when they come and stick their syrupy hands on my face. Sticky love does not sound pleasant. But it's described this way because sometimes jeong and how it plays out as love does not always feel good but instead it is doing the right thing from love, even if you do not want to do it. Within this definition, love is not merely a sentiment.

In our scripture reading today, we start mid conversation between Jesus and his disciples. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Right here at the beginning of this passage it sounds like Jesus is saying that love requires some kind of obedience or engagement with more than just a feeling or sentiment. And although our minds might immediately go to the ten commandments from the Hebrew scriptures, what does Jesus mean "his" commandments?

Well, one chapter earlier and if we as a community can flashback to Maundy Thursday and Holy Week, the gospel of John gives us the answer. Just days before his pending death, Jesus says, "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." This particular commandment is the *only* recorded commandment in the gospel of John.

And so for this gospel writer, if we love God, everything we say and do comes down to love. All of the prayers we pray, the mission work we engage in, the mercy we extend and gifts we give and offer, it all comes down to love. The ultimate question for us this morning seems to be, "Do we love one another as Jesus loved us? Do we? Or do we not?"

New Testament scholar D.A. Carson frames it this way: "This new command is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, and yet it is profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice."

Friends, do we love one another as Jesus loved us?

Someone recently commenting on how hard love is said: "Love takes time, effort, discipline, and transformation, and I am just so darned busy." Love requires trust and for most of us, trust is built over time, it does not just happen.

But in our passage, Jesus is pretty clear. This is my commandment-not, this is my suggestion to you all. It's not a matter of personal preference but a command-a duty that we are called to fulfill.

Theologian Debie Thomas writes, "Jesus's conflation of love and obedience feels so jarring. Essentially, he is *commanding* us to love other people, whether we want to or not, whether we like them or not, and we are *not* used to thinking about love in terms of obedience to a command. Can we be ordered to love? Does love obey decrees?" She continues, "My guess is, most of us would say no. Shaped as we are by Hollywood, by romance novels, by Valentine's Day sentimentality, we tend to think of love as spontaneous and free-flowing. *We fall* in love. Love is blind, it happens at first sight, it breaks our hearts, its course never runs smooth, etc. etc. etc. Real love, many of us might say, has nothing to do with calculated obedience. Real love is an emotion. A feeling."

But friends, to contrast this a little bit, in my conversations with those Korean clergywomen, the jeong love would fall more in line with what Jesus is asking and saying here. It's a sticky love that, yes, sometimes is birthed by authentic affection for someone but sometimes it comes forth by obedience and duty to doing what it is right. Almost like you can't help it. During one session we watched an edited Korean drama clip of a meal time scene among several families. The scenes moved from one family to the next bringing each other a side dish of food. And it becomes humorous because it seems like it's some kind of irritated competition and the teen or adult child who has to deliver it to the neighbor cannot sit down to actually eat because the moment they come back with a dish, they're asked to bring another dish out to other neighbors.

The scenes move back and forth like this for longer than you would think but at the end what happens as a result is that the screen pans to a recently widowed father and his young son who had started out their meal with 2 small dishes on their table and at the end find it overflowing with side dishes and suddenly they have more than enough to eat. An abundance.

And so I think what Jesus is asking is this combination of the concept of jeong along with the Hollywood shaped rom-com nuances of love that we in this society are influenced by. He's asking for it to be authentic and real and at the same time active and dutiful and no less than the love he offers us so freely.

Friends, I don't know about you, but doesn't this command to love seem impossible? At the same time, though, don't you long for what he's describing here? Love one another as I have loved you. Unconditionally, authentically, dutifully, actively, always. People would not have flocked to Jesus if they sensed his compassion was forced.

Imagine what the church and society could look like if we took this commandment seriously and cultivated this impossible sticky love. To say we love Jesus while we hold and guard space between ourselves and fellow human beings is not sufficient. Love one another as I have loved you. Like, for real. Not only when you feel like it. Not only toward and for the people you already like. All others. Yes, the friend, the partner the neighbor and the one who is likeable. But also yes, the stranger, the enemy, the one with whom you cannot agree, the one voting on the opposite political party from you.

And if this news feels discouraging to you today because you like to keep your circle of love close to you and with those you know you already trust, if the sticky love does not sound appealing to you either, if the news of this aching world is too much to bear and you just do not feel like pruning your heart to love this day, then that's okay. The good news is that the commandment comes with a promise. We are promised an Advocate, the Spirit, to guide us and give us the words when we do not know how to pray or how to love as Jesus commands us to love. We are not asked to do this alone or solely by our own will power. The Spirit is within you already. God's heart is already living in you. Will you allow that Spirit to open up in you this day?

Church, this jeong, this impossible sticky command to love one another as God in Christ loves us is the different call of the life we are asked to live as disciples of this Jesus the Christ who loved us until the end. Like a parent who loves their child, it does not always feel good, but the love does not stop.

In these days we live in of continued gun violence, polarized groups, war, and reactionary anger to various things, how we move forward into the days ahead are critical. We will mess up and take some missteps along the way, but the beauty of our faith reminds us that there is grace, mercy, healing and resurrection. Friends, don't forget resurrection. But remember it always comes after death. It might not be how we imagined it to be, and we might not know how to articulate it, but today, may the impossible sticky love of God in Christ- jeong-go with us and guide us and extend from us wherever we go and in whatever we do. May it be so. Amen.

Inclusive language-As we begin our reading, I want to point out that I've changed the pronouns for the Spirit to be feminine. A lot of languages have gendered words and the word for Spirit, "pneuma," in the Greek is gender neutral but the word in Hebrew, "ruah," is feminine. And in light of the today where we celebrate women, I took that liberty with the text. Hear now the word of God:

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and they will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever.<sup>17</sup>This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees her nor knows her. You know her, because she abides with you, and she will be in you.

18 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'

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Bless our God, O peoples,  
let the sound of God's praise be heard,  
<sup>9</sup> who has kept us among the living,  
and has not let our feet slip.  
<sup>10</sup> For you, O God, have tested us;  
you have tried us as silver is tried.  
<sup>11</sup> You brought us into the net;  
you laid burdens on our backs;  
<sup>12</sup> you let people ride over our heads;  
we went through fire and through water;  
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.  
<sup>13</sup> I will come into your house with burnt-offerings;  
I will pay you my vows,  
<sup>14</sup> those that my lips uttered  
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.  
<sup>15</sup> I will offer to you burnt-offerings of fatlings,  
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;  
I will make an offering of bulls and goats.  
*Selah*  
<sup>16</sup> Come and hear, all you who fear God,  
and I will tell what God has done for me.  
<sup>17</sup> I cried aloud to him,  
and God was extolled with my tongue.  
<sup>18</sup> If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,  
the Lord would not have listened.  
<sup>19</sup> But truly God has listened;  
God has given heed to the words of my prayer.