

February is the month we celebrate love. St. Valentine's Day is the 14<sup>th</sup>, but well before that we see the heart-shaped pink and red balloons in the stores, and we start thinking about who we're going to give cards and/or candy. That thinking reminds us, yet again, of who the important people in our life are, and why we feel they are important to us. It is a good thing to take that time out of our "regular" schedule, to pause and think about the people who mean so much to us--the people who form us and shape our life.

Love is an important part of our faith too. If you looked up how many times the word "love" appears in the Bible, it would be in the hundreds. Think of the phrases you know from the Bible with "love" in it: "For God so loved the world. . ."; "No greater love. . ."; "Love your neighbor. . ."; and "God is love. . ." are some that come to my mind. Throughout the Bible there is the constant theme of God's love for Israel, and for all humanity. And it was because of God's love that Jesus came to live among us, to be a sacrifice for us, and to establish a new relationship between us and God.

Jesus spoke a lot about loving one another. In fact, as the quote at the bottom of the page suggests, loving one another is the identifying mark of being a Christian—a follower of Jesus. "They'll know we are Christians by our love" is more than just a song. It is to be the thing about Christians that identifies for the world who they are, just as a Scout shirt identifies the youth who wears it as being a member of Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts.

It is not always easy to love each other. Some people can give love, but feel uncomfortable receiving love. Some people have been so shaped by their life experiences that they have a hard time giving or receiving love. And, being human, it's often easy to get so focused on getting our needs met that we forget about the needs of others. Love can sometimes languish on the sidelines.

But God's love is always there, to fill us, to support us, and to be a source for us. It is there to remind us that this is the badge we wear for the world, to let them know whose we are. It is there to form us and to shape us. It is good to remember love and to celebrate it.

Shalom,  
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