**“ ‘OFT FORGOTTEN LOVE!”**

**INTRO:** Let’s be frank and you be earnest. I’m 80 years old. I’m in the last 15 years of my life – the only question is whether it’s near the beginning or ending of those 15. Because of good physicians, good meds and good pharmacists, as well as good hospitals, I’m aiming for 85.

I’ve been asked to deliver this sermon today, somewhere in the midst of my last 15 years, give or take a few years, shall we say.

So where do you get resources to write a sermon to people who are getting older – all of us are! – whether 20, 40, 60, 80 or more. For many of us, we have the biggest part of our lives behind us. And some of us may have become more than 80…by so doing we’re soon going to qualify as “old old.”

I say all of the above to make this point: The most precious possession we have is the life we are now living. It may sound presumptuous, but I’m going to be telling you momentarily how to live your lives; but for the moment let me say this: If our lives are the most precious possession we have, should we not be valuing our lives in a way that reflects that kind of self-awareness?

Now in the quest for living in a way that reflects that kind of valuing, I want to share a story that most of us have already heard half of. It’s about two pieces of art. The first one is the one we see on the wall here.

Most of us are familiar with where this sculpture came from. About five or six years ago I preached a sermon on the great commandment:

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the great and first commandment,*”

writes the Gospel of Matthew.

In that sermon, I had made the point that if you love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and with all your strength, how can you have anything left over to love your neighbor as yourself? UNLESS, the way we love God is not to get down on our knees and pray, “Oh God how great you are, and you are so wonderful.” No, it’s finding the neighbor in need, to whom we can give of our love.

In other words, loving God is loving your neighbor and loving your neighbor is loving God. They are synonymous.

Back to the text: After saying we’re to love God with everything we have, Jesus then makes an incredible addition to the first and greatest commandment. He adds, “*And the second [commandment] is like it. ‘You shall love your neighbor as [you love] yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.”*

In other words, if in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy there are 613 commandments – that’s the *Torah,* – 611 of them, plus the sayings of the prophets, are propped up by these two commandments: love God and love your neighbor as yourself. But that wasn’t the best part of that sermon:

Joe Kotler was in the audience that day sitting on the second row. He was 92 and retired as General Counsel of Paramount Pictures. His wife Barbara Cameron had been a professional actress and singer, which included not only stage productions, but also commercials and voicing cartoons. In fact, she wrote and sang the cartoon, “Rode Runner.” I mentioned that one Sunday and asked her if she still sang it. She stood and sang it on the spot.

Anyway, Joe was a sometime practicing Jew and a member of All Faiths, as was Barbara. I preached that sermon on the great commandment and on the way out from service, Joe said, “Stop by and see me sometime this week.” He lived just a block from Joyce and me in the Landings, so I called, set up an appointment, and went by to see him. He said he wanted to fund a piece of art that reflected the theme I had preached the previous Sunday. His initial check was for $10,000. Later, we went back for another few thousand to pay the artists for the prototypes of the art they were submitting, so that we had something to judge by.

A year or so later I preached another sermon that reflected some of that same sentiment. And afterward, one of our members who is here today I see, said to me, “Wayne, that verse also says ‘as you love yourself.’ Ever since Mass as a child and church as an adult, I never hear any sermons on that part of the verse! What about self-love?”

Which formulates the title of my presentation this morning:

“…Oft Forgotten Love.”

To the question, the member asked, “What about *loving ourselves*? Am I not going to say anything about that?” Yes, I am.

But there’s a slight problem: We don’t have any Joe Kotler here to give ten or $15,000 to create a sculpture that we could hang up on the wall memorializing self-love. Plus, what kind of sculpture could we have for “as you love yourself?” Self-love.

How did the committee choose Susan Gott’s piece?” Did she do a little bittsy one for you to see? Or did she do drawings? How did it happen?

Kay Riegler: Are you here? Come tell us how you chose this sculpture over all the other entries?

First Service: Kay Riegler and her committee selected Susan Gott’s sculpture and one other for the congregation to decide on. Here we have it. It’s gorgeous isn’t it? Love God with everything and your neighbor as yourself.

Second Service: {Interview Kay}

Now (Kay), I’ve got a perfect idea for a piece reflecting the theme, “as you love yourself.” I even have a prototype over here somewhere. Here it is: I brought it all by myself. It’s a model for a piece of sculpture reflecting, “as you love yourself.”

Now help me out here: Look in to that mirror a moment. Who is there? It’s a reflection of who should be your favorite person. So (Kay), look at the reflection and say, “I love myself.” (Pass it around to two or three others.) See it made them all smile.

What if the first thing you say to yourself in the morning is to look in the mirror and say, “I love myself.” At least three times.

In fact, if we had a pope, we might consider passing a “papal decree” that states, “Every time you look at a mirror in a bathroom you repeat, ‘I love myself.’” We could even erect a big mirror on the wall so that when you came in to the building, you could look at it and say, “I love myself.” Right?

So today sometime, look in the mirror at those wonderful eyes of yours. Try to imagine how many million different images they’ve taken pictures of and then passed on to your brain in milliseconds.

And that nose. Holy Moley. Think of all the flowers you’ve smelled. Think of the smell of all the food’s you’ve eaten. Think how amazing it is that our nose takes in carbon dioxide and our body transforms it into oxygen for our lungs.

Did I mention your ears? As I mentioned, I’m 80. My ears are still growing! But think of what they’ve heard: For example, *Albinoni’s Adagio in G minor*, especially when it was played for the world the day after the bombing, 27 days in a row at the site of the bombing of the bakery in Sarajevo back in the ‘90s where 27 people were killed standing in line waiting to buy bread.

Remember hearing the words of your mother, father, brother, sister, teacher, friend, the love of your life – and what they said.

In fact, Helen Keller who was blind and deaf communicated that it was hearing she would most value having. So love your ears.

But also: Love your lips. Think how many people you’ve kissed, and how kissing is such a common form of greeting.

Love your teeth. Love your hair (I meant to get a haircut yesterday, but I had to write a sermon.)

Love every part of your face that you see in the mirror. So that when you say, “I love myself,” you think of all those parts I mentioned – eyes, ears, lips, nose, and realize that we havn’t even mentioned the rest of your body, not only your insides but your outside – all things to be grateful for and to love.

I better check that out myself! I need to look in that mirror. Wow! I love myself at 80 for crying out loud. It’s wonderful to be alive…to be vertical…to be here in this service with you.

So why don’t we have a moment’s pause and ask, why we don’t say something so right, so truthful, so important and so on target, such as, “I love myself?”

Ready: “I love myself.”

Too many of us have been taught to think of ourselves as “sinners.” But we don’t spend most of the day doing bad. To the contrary: We may have made mistakes, but we’re not a mistake.

So remember: Love yourself. Look in the mirror each morning and say, I love myself. Three times.

Healthy love for self is a well-rounded person.

Know that it’s the most natural thing to love yourself which liberates you to love others, which is synonymous with loving God.

**CONCLUSION**

Here’s a little ditty I wrote years ago that punctuates what I was saying:

*If we are* s*inners by nature, then when we do bad, we should feel good, because that’s our nature.*

*If we are sinners by nature, when we do good, we should feel bad because that’s our nature.*

*The truth is that when we do good, we feel good, and when we do bad we feel bad.*

*We all have the capacity to be good and to love ourselves because it’s our nature.*

*Shalom! Amen! Namaste! Blessed be.*