

The Greatest of These Is Love

It has become a common practice to judge people despite Jesus' admonition not to (Luke 6:37-42). Too many Christians think the supreme test is how much faith a person has. Since faith cannot be measured with a tangible measure like inches or ounces, people look for other ways. Among them, the human assumption that faith brings prosperity and therefore, people who are wealthy, healthy, and happy must be more faithful than those who are not, even though, through the centuries, people's faith has often been at its most visible when they are suffering; even persecuted. Scripture also tells us God gives good things to everyone and expects us to do the same. Another attempt to measure 'faith' is by assuming 'my' particular ideology is 'faithful'. Therefore, the more closely others agree with 'me', the more faith they have, and disagreeing with 'me' means you have no faith. Such thinking does not, in fact, measure faith. It says far more about the person passing judgment than about the faith of those being judged.

In reality, trying to measure faith at all is missing the point. Jesus said even mustard seed faith can move mountains (Matthew 17:20)! We are cautioned not to think too highly of ourselves and to see things in light of the faith and gifts/functions assigned to us by God (Romans 12:3-8). When Jesus talks of who will enter the kingdom of God, it is not faith that is at the top of the list. It is Love and concern for others! Romans 12:1-21 gives us the marks of a true Christian and Romans reminds us that our *love* for one another must be genuine; that we are to be patient in suffering, and *love* those who persecute us. I Corinthians 13 makes it clearer by defining what love is; concluding with this declaration: "*And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love.*" (13:13)

Loving others is a choice we must make. It is not always easy or safe, but it is the first step to bringing change. Too often, we resort to judgment, and finding fault comes with that. Choosing to love changes things because *our* attitudes change and make it much more likely we can see the things we have in common rather than our differences. When we focus on common ground, it is far easier to find solutions even for major problems and settle even long-standing differences. Love is the greatest because it puts the people involved above ideologies and differences. Then, out of love, comes hope and possibilities!

Pray for:

- **Ukraine:** The invasion continues. Pray that a way to peace can be found. Devastating Attacks on civilians are escalating with weapons intended to cause civilian casualties. The cities are under siege & being destroyed. At least 3 million Ukrainians have fled the country. More than a million are displaced within the country. Injury & death totals are not clear.
- **The COVID Pandemic.** New COVID case numbers are declining in much of the U.S., though the CDC reported (March 15th) that there is an increase in COVID-19 in wastewater samples nation-wide. The number of cases is climbing in parts of the world. Many places are lifting safety protocols, even as the pandemic continues. The weekly death toll from COVID is still 10 times higher than for other respiratory viruses.
- Heavy Rain has caused a landslide in **Rteaman, Peru**. 60 to 80 homes were buried & at least 15 people are missing including children, 8 survivors have been dug out, 1 has died.
- **Those dealing with natural disasters.** Storms & flooding, as well as fires in a number of places – Florida, the American West, Argentina, & elsewhere.
- **Victims of Gun Violence** – there have been 94 mass shootings (up from 82 last week) in 2022 in which 101 people died & 350 were injured. The 2022 gun death total is now 8,692. 316 deaths & 693 of the injured are children (17 or younger). Many states, including Ohio, are weakening gun laws, despite the fact that the number of homicides & other gun crimes has increased where gun laws are weakened. Access to guns is often more dangerous to gun owners than to others since more than half of gun deaths (4,950 so far this year) are suicides.



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