

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Have you ever found yourself *lost in religion*? It can happen. Episcopalians tend to be pretty patient and kind about such things. And yet there can still be some lingering fear that if we ever actually admit that we *have been--or are--lost* in religion, then something bad might happen. But nothing bad will happen here.

Being “lost in religion” can be experienced in different ways. It isn’t uncommon as people are living into their 20’s and 30’s or more, that there can be an extended period of time when they don’t know what to do with their religion or how to connect with it again. How do you even begin to choose a church anymore? Others can get lost in the controversies, misconduct, and politics of churches in the news. Some who *have* long been in church can hit times when all the church words and church things become empty. Others can have a time when their ideas of God may not make sense like they used to. There are different ways we can get “lost in religion”.

In the Jewish tradition in which Jesus grew up, there was especially one way that Jews could get lost in *their* religion. It was commonly recognized in those days that there were 613 laws to which Jews were accountable. What in the world do you do with 613 laws?! So, it wasn’t uncommon for caring rabbis to try to get to the heart of the matter for their congregations, as Jesus did when he was questioned. Many rabbis would have nodded in affirmation of Jesus’ focus on “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” They would not necessarily have thought to pair that focus on *God* with “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Religion, after all, doesn’t always do a good job of holding *the love of God and neighbor together*. And *loving ourselves* sounds like a good idea but often ends up being quite elusive too.

But there is no doubt that *love* is very much the key to becoming *un-lost in religion*. Or as a hymn says: “I once was lost...and now I’m found...” Love has everything to do with it.

So let me say a few things about a very old Christian tradition that you may not be aware of. There is *trilogy of virtues* which are called the “theological virtues”: *faith, hope, and love*. This trilogy sounds familiar because they are named in the Collect of the Day which we prayed. And the apostle Paul spoke of this *trilogy of faith, hope, and love...three times* (1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8 and 1 Cor. 13). And one of these is in 1 Corinthians 13 where Paul *prioritized the virtue of love above all else* when he said: “So, faith, hope, love remain, but the greatest of these is love”. This is part of a text that is often read at weddings...and yet Paul’s emphasis on love, like Jesus, also points to how we become *un-lost in religion...and are found*.

The Christian tradition of the theological virtues says that *faith, hope, and love...all potentially exist in each of us*. They are part of us, even in quietest ways that don’t even seem religious. They are there when we are feeling a *confidence in life and the ability to take another step into the light of day*. Sometimes, this quiet form of faith, hope, and love is what actually carries us to this place on a Sunday morning, or moves us to care about someone, or leads us to do right by ourselves in a way we have managed to neglect. Faith, hope, and love are already in us.

But these virtues really come into flower when we are *graced* by God...when we awaken again to the *divine love...when we are found*. *It is such love that helps us become un-lost in religion...stirring up the faith, hope, and love...within us*.

And it may even happen on your way *to church...driving along...and suddenly becoming aware of the sheer gift of so much autumn beauty...the gift of our being...a simple and yet vastly mysterious...love*.