

The Shape of Christian Identity
 Class 3 Bernard: Love, the shape of Christian identity
 Outline

1. The central call of love in Holy Scripture.
 - John 3:16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Leviticus 19:9-18
 - Romans 5:8; John 21; 1 John 4:7-12

2. Bernard's life
 - Born in Dijon, France.
 - Abbot of Clairvaux from age 22 until his death
 - “The Last of the Fathers.”
 - “The conscience of all of Europe.”
 - Central to Bernard's theology is the notion that Love created us out of love to share Love itself, and then redeemed us after we had sinned.”

3. The four degrees of love as found in *On the Love of God*.
 - **First**, we love ourselves for our own sake: selfish and self-absorbed.

 - **Second**, we love God for our own sake: we love God because he can help us.
 - “[I]f trials and tribulations continue to come upon us, every time God brings us through, even if our hearts were made of stone, we will begin to be softened because of the grace of the Rescuer.”

 - **Third**, we love God for his sake: we love God just because he is God.
 - “If we begin to worship and come to God again and again by meditating, by prayer, and by obedience, little by little God becomes known to us through experience. We enter into a sweet familiarity with God, and by tasting how sweet the Lord is we pass into the third degree of love so that now we love God, not for our own sake, but for himself.”
 - The outworking of this love is loving our neighbor: “For truly those who love God in this way, also love the things of God.”

- **Fourth**, we love ourselves for God’s sake: a self-forgetful love.
 - “Blessed are we who experience the fourth degree of love wherein we love ourselves for God’s sake. Such experiences are rare and come only for a moment.”
 - “We will experience the joy of the Lord and be forgetful of ourselves in a wonderful way. We are, for those moments, one mind and one spirit with God.”

4. Conclusion.

“Love is sufficient of itself, it gives pleasure by itself and because of itself. It is its own merit, its own reward. Love looks for no cause outside itself, no effect beyond itself. Its profit lies in its practice. I love because I love, I love that I may love. Love is a great thing so long as it continually returns to its fountainhead, flows back to its source, always drawing from there the water which constantly replenishes it. Of all the movements, sensations and feelings of the soul, love is the only one in which the creature can respond to the Creator and make some sort of similar return however unequal though it be. For when God loves, all he desires is to be loved in return; the sole purpose of his love is to be loved, in the knowledge that those who love him are made happy by their love of him.

“The Bridegroom’s love, or rather the love which is the Bridegroom, asks in return nothing but faithful love. Let the beloved, then, love in return. Should not a bride love, and above all, Love’s bride? Could it be that Love not be loved?” (from sermon 83 by Bernard on the Song of Solomon)

Questions for discussion:

- 1) What is intriguing for you about the teaching and life of Bernard?
- 2) What is challenging to you about the life and teaching of Bernard?
- 3) What does Bernard’s teaching about love say to you about your life in Christ?
- 4) Be sure to re-read this last quotation from Bernard and discuss it.
- 5) What steps would you like to take in your Christian walk based on the things you heard tonight?

Bernard on the timeline:



Abraham
(c. 2000 BC)

Peter & Paul (c. 60) Gregory Ambrose (d. 394) (d. 397)

Bernard
(d. 1153)

Theresa
(d. 1582)

Us
(2019)

Bernard on the map:

