
“Thanks–Christ–New Year’s!” A Season of Love

An article for the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler

If there is any Greek word that Christians are most familiar with, it is probably the Greek word for “love,” which is *agapé*. *Agapé*, we say, is that love which is self-giving, divine, and which puts us in touch with something holy. It is *agapé* which is used in the beautiful description of love which St. Paul writes about in First Corinthians: “Love is patient; love is kind; ... It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

But there are other strong words for love in the Bible, and in other ancient civilizations. In Hebrew, the word for divine love is *hesed*, which includes divine mercy and loving kindness. *Hesed* is the love that emanates from a true relationship with God. Hebrew also uses the word *ahab* for love, which is commonly between two persons; it might be referred to as “secular” love.

Sometimes it is handy to note the four different words for love that the ancient Greeks used. First, there was certainly *agapé*, divine love. But there was also *eros*, from which we get the word erotic, and which meant romantic or even carnal love. There was also *philia*, which describes the love between friends. Fourthly, the Greek word *storgé* referred to love within a family.

Most of us consider springtime as the season for love, don’t we? We think of the birds and the bees, and romantic love, and the season for weddings. But we are probably thinking only of *eros* love when we make spring its season. As wonderful as romantic love is, there are other loves, even loves that can be more satisfying and lasting.

Consider that beautiful song from the musical, *Rent*, written by Jonathan Larson, “Five hundred twenty five thousand six hundred minutes.” The lines include “Five hundred twenty five thousand moments so dear / How do you measure, Measure a year? / How about love? Seasons of love.”

The seasons of love are every season of the year, if we have eyes and ears to see and hear. And this next season of seven weeks, from around Thanksgiving to just after New Year’s Day, can include all the various types and words for love we can imagine. I realize that sometimes this long holiday season seems forced upon us. Perhaps we will be in homes and at parties and with people and wish we were not with them! Perhaps we will know loneliness in dreadful ways.

But this seven week season can also be a way to explore and deepen our various loving relationships: the familial ones, the friendly ones, the romantic ones. It may be that we learn ultimately about divine love through all these other loves.

In the final analysis, I wonder where there is any real difference between these various loves. A family love teaches us about personal history and commitment. Love between friends teaches us about loyalty and recreation. Romantic love teaches us about tenderness and care. All of our loves teach us something about forgiveness and mercy. All of our loves, whatever they might be called, teach us about God, teach us about divine love, teach us about self-giving. They teach us about losing ourselves—even if just for a moment—on behalf of another person. All of our loves can be *agapé*. All true love is giving; love gives our self away on behalf of another. Miraculously, as we give ourselves away in love, we actually become stronger, not weaker; and we actually become more ourselves. In giving ourselves away, we find our true selves. And we find God.

Perhaps during these next seven weeks—during this Season of “Thanks-Christ-New Year’s”—we will meet all these various types of love. Maybe we will give ourselves away to them. Maybe God will enter those places where we have given away. Maybe we will know *agapé*.

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