

LOVE PERIOD.

WITH REV. DR.
JACQUI LEWIS

Love Thy Neighbor
With Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis

Jacqui Lewis: Hey, love. I'm Jacqui Lewis and this is Love Period. We've not made new episodes in a little bit. In this season, my producers have been busy, I've been busy building a building and trying to be a public theologian in the spaces that have drawn all of us into deep reflection and sometimes worry, to be honest. But we're coming back. We've got a new season coming and we're so excited about it. In the meantime, these reflections, these short monologues are personal to me and I hope will be helpful to you. What do we mean by Love Period?

What do we mean by love in the space of our personal relationships? And our life of work, play, and as citizens on the planet, what's love got to do with that? I've been thinking really hard about it, frankly, writing a little bit about it. And I'm sharing these pieces with you, hoping that there's something in it for you. I hope these reflections, these monologues can help you think about loving yourself and your neighbor more robustly, more kindly, more generously, more fully, more authentically. I'm working on that and maybe you are too. So here we go.

Love Period. On a day like today, I'm thinking about how loveless the spaces feel so much violent talk in the media. I'm talking about the traditional media. Where do you get the news? You get us versus them. Yes versus no. In versus out. You can tune in to get your point of view reinforced, but it's difficult to find a space to get the news, just the news, so you can run it through your own filter and wonder what's happening and what can you do about it. That's the media, media, and then there's the social media. Oh, my goodness. All you have to do is say one word, one word that someone disagrees with and you are the devil. Or if you're me, a Christian pastor, you're not really a Christian. If you're lefty and your church is open to women preaching, gay folks being there, you are somehow evil. Or if you don't say the right word, you're canceled.

I'm thinking to myself, what's love got to do with any of this? And I'm a Christian pastor. Yes, progressive. Yes, left of center. But I really, really love the teachings of Rabbi Jesus. And when I find myself thinking about what's love got to do with this? I hear the questions of the people of his time wanted to know what's faith? What does it look like? What are you wanting from us? I mean, this baby born in Bethlehem, this teenager raised in Nazareth and Galilee, I would say a Jewish Palestinian boy born in a scandal. Some people believed his mother that the pregnancy was from God and others thought some kind of way she'd broken the law. Poor outsider, born homeless, refugee, immigrant baby Rabbi grows up.

Inside the empire, but outside of the empire's teachings a Jewish baby trying to figure out how to be faithful and teaching people how to be faithful. Who when asked what you're supposed to do says love God with your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. He's not making a new commandment. He's quoting his scriptures, Leviticus and Deuteronomy and saying, love. Love all of God with all you have and love your neighbor as yourself. Love Period, that's how we get to the title of this podcast, but also a guiding principle. Just love all the people, all the neighbors, and this isn't just Christian. This is almost all the world's major religions.

Judaism says, love the stranger because you were once strangers in the strange land. Christianity says, do unto others as you'd have them do unto you. Buddhism says, don't withhold something that someone needs. So also Islam and Zoroastrianism, which I have to say I don't know that much about, but I do know that it says, don't withhold what the other

one needs. The Sikh tradition says, don't do anything to break anyone's heart. Just don't do anything to break anyone's heart. Wow, that's... What a high bar, but also a low one. Just don't be a heartbreaker.

I think all of these religious teachings come from this ancient teaching of Ubuntu, U-B-U-N-T-U Ubuntu. South African Zulu, all the Sub-Saharan languages have some version of this umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu. Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu. A human is a human through other humans. We're not human except that other people are human is what this teaching says, and it predates religion. It's when we first walk out of caves and become people who stand up on two legs. We look around and know when we see the sunlight that someone's got to farm and someone's got to fish and someone's got to take care of the kids, and someone's got to cook and someone's got to protect us. We need each other to survive. We are each other's keepers.

Actually, Dr. King said it this way, "I can't be fully who I am until you're fully who you are." We are woven together in this human garb, this human fabric inextricably connected one to the other. My fate and your fate are intertwined. I'm talking all of our fates, no matter where we live on the planet, Ukraine or Russia, Haiti or Congo or Sudan or Detroit or California or Israel, Palestine and right here on these United States. What happens to me affects what happens to you and what happens to you affects what happens to me.

That's the kind of love Rabbi Jesus was talking about. If they're in prison, if they're hungry, if they're naked, if they're lonely, if they're a stranger, a widow, a child, if they're an outsider, if they're last, they become first. And our holy imagination, this kind of love is radical beyond borders, beyond religion, beyond gender, beyond sexuality, beyond have and have not beyond. Blue and red is love your neighbor across these religious categories and belief systems and just as humans where we might be thinking, also love the creatures and love the earth. So I'm wondering what love means now. On the way to an election and on the other side of it, whenever you hear these words, who's your neighbor and how do you love them?

Can you see their humanity, feel their humanity? Sense their connectedness to you the way you're alike, even though you're different. The way their blood is red, no matter what color their skin is, the way their heart beats, no matter who they love or how they love them. Can you sense your neighbor's kinship with you and therefore be imagining that their self-interest and your self-interest are intertwined? That a life of faithfulness to however you name God includes loving the ones God loves, the ones created in the image of God.

My tradition says the human ones whose DNA is just so much like yours that a fruit fly, a common fruit fly has more genetic difference one to the other than we do as humans. Do you know what I'm saying? We are each other's people. We are each other's kin. We are each other's kind. I'm so bored. I'm so tired. I'm so frustrated by all the hate, and I wonder what it looks like if we actually make love a public ethic. Love a guiding principle. Love, a way to begin and end each day. Love, a lens through which to look at the earth's problems and its opportunities, its beauty. Love, a thing to teach our kiddos a thing to talk about over coffee and wine and good food. A way to go to the polls and to be a community afterwards, no matter what the results are.

Love is our north star. Love Period. Not hate, love. Not derision, love. Not judgment, love.

Not violence, love. Not death-dealing politics, love period. Knowing that everything else is commentary and mid-rash and opinion. You are a theologian in residence in your own life, beloved. You are a theologian in residence in your own life. What will love have you do? What's a conversation you need to have that someone wants to have with you, maybe needs to have with you too?

What is a starting place to look at the world through someone else's eyes and have empathy for them? I'm asking you today to pick a person, see a person. When we're writing or preaching or teaching, someone says, who's the one person you're trying to reach? Who's the one person that you want to understand better and what to learn from and perhaps also teach? Pick a person to start with. I'm not saying go to the person that will make you feel in danger or in harm, but somebody who can be a conversation partner about what love needs to be now for all of us. Will you consider that one person and then maybe another who can increase your tribe, help you to see things differently, help you to love more profoundly? A neighbor, not exactly like you, but a neighbor, nonetheless. Let's try that, won't you?

Thank you for listening to these reflections this fall as we've explored what it means to listen, learn and lean into peace. We're working on a new season of Love Period, and we invite your thoughts as to what you'd like to see and hear in the next season. You can drop an email to Dorothy and Corey, my producers at podcasts@cac.org. That's podcasts@cac.org. We'd love to hear from you and can't wait to share a brand new season of Love Period with you in 2025.