

When asked what the most important thing was, Jesus answered with a Top-3. First, Jesus said, is the Shema: the prayer of the Jewish people, recited multiple times a day to remind them that everything belongs to God. “Hear, O Isreal, the Lord is God, the Lord is One.” The Most Important Thing, Capital T, M, I, and T, is that there is one God who created everything that is, and was, and ever will be. That one God created all of humankind in its beautiful diversity. That one God created a world with no borders. That one God created human beings out of love and for love and told us, again and again that welcoming the stranger is a really big deal. Second, really 1A on the list of Most Important Things, Jesus says, is to love the one God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Third, maybe 1B, is the love our neighbors as ourselves.

Summing all that up, I think it is safe to say that when Jesus is asked what is most important, his answer is, quite simply, love.

Love is the answer to every question. Love is the solution to every problem. Love is the key to success in every test life might throw our way. Love is THE MOST IMPORANT THING! And love, as I'm sure you all know, is a verb. Love is not passive. Love requires action. Tonight, we gather to continue showing this community's love for Ernesto Manuel-Andres. Many of you have already been out in the streets, showing him love, by protesting for his release. Tonight, we pause to ask the one God, the God of love, to use our love to change the hearts and minds of those who have the power to release Ernesto. Tonight is one step in a long journey of love.

Loving our neighbors means wanting for our neighbors what we want for ourselves and our loved ones. Love means wanting a safe country where the rights enshrined in our Constitution are honored and respected by all in power, especially those who have the power to arrest and punish. Love means we would not want to

be illegally arrested and detained, and love means we don't want that for Ernesto or anyone. And love means we would want people to fight for our rights and freedoms when the government threatens them. Love means we would not want to be forgotten, so we will not forget Ernesto.

Love means saying Ernesto's name until the world is tired of hearing it. Love means picking up the phone and calling the offices of Brett Guthrie, Rand Paul, and Mitch McConnell every day until Ernesto is back home where he belongs. Love means calling the White House at 202-456-1111 to let this Administration know that we are not ok with people being kidnapped from their homes, denied due process, and shipped off to prison having broken no laws. Love means being steadfast in the truth that Ernesto's status as a Special Immigrant Juvenile means that his imprisonment is unlawful and unconstitutional, and that he deserves to be set free. Love may mean picking up a picket sign or

devoting Friday to prayer and fasting or pinning on a purple and gold ribbon until this missing Purple comes home. Love is most important to the heart of God. Love is a verb. Love requires action.

In just a minute, we there will be some time to act in a couple small ways. First, you'll be invited to come forward as you feel led to light a candle while asking God's light to shine in the darkness of this moment, or asking God to bring hope to Ernesto and those who are fighting for his release from his unjust imprisonment, or maybe even asking God's light to convict those in power to do what is right for the welfare of Ernesto and for the sake of the world. You may also spend a little time writing a note of support which we hope to be able to get to him this week. Small actions add up. God will bless even the lighting of a simple candle in ways we can't even imagine. So, thank you. Thank you for being here. Thank you for showing up for a young man who is likely a stranger

to you. Thank you for choosing to love your neighbor as yourself.

That is the truly faithful response in the face of evil and injustice.

Thank you for continuing to choose love. Amen.