

Sermon October 25: What does Love ask from us?

The gospel reading this morning is one of the most famous gospel passages. Jesus is being asked about which is the greatest commandment. In his answer Jesus summarizes the entire law of Moses in 2 short phrases. 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

Why was Jesus even asked about the most important commandment by someone who was already an expert in the Law? Let me describe what is going on in the passage.

Jesus has become very popular with the common people. They crowd to hear him every time he teaches. He uses parables and stories to help them understand the important things he had come to teach them. The Pharisees, who are questioning him in this passage, are highly educated religious teachers, who had, over many years, evolved a highly complex set of 613 rules to obey in order to keep the law of God.

The Pharisees have become antagonistic toward Jesus because he is ignoring a number of these rules. A number of these violations are recorded clearly in the gospels. Jesus heals on the Sabbath which is considered work and no work is allowed on the Sabbath. Jesus plucked grain in the field and ate it on a Sabbath, again that is forbidden work. Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors which was forbidden for a virtuous person. And when Jesus did these violations and was challenged, he often pointed out to those who questioned his actions that loving and caring for God's people was more important than keeping man made laws.

In this gospel passage Jesus tells us that the whole of the law he follows can be summed up in two statements on love. Love God and Love neighbor as yourself.

Let's look at these commandments. Loving God with our whole heart, soul and mind. What does this mean? Loving God with all your heart means that we love God with all our emotion. This is often the way we use the word love in English. Love is a feeling. We feel intense love toward our spouse our children and others. But we can feel an even greater love toward the God who has given us life, sustains us and redeemed us. The love of God is often a sense for us of deep and profound gratitude that overwhelms us when we contemplate all God has done for us.

Loving God with all our soul means that we love God completely. We may love others with some reservations at times. But the love of God is total, unquestionable, unending. When all else passes away you will always have God's love and your love of God.

Loving God with our mind means that we cultivate the word of God in our mind and we live by that. It means that we study the words of scripture and the commands of Jesus so that we can exist in the world purposely following the way of Christ. It requires us to know the truth that is found in the scripture and other teachings and to act on it in our lives.

Jesus then tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus tells us that we must love as he has loved us and that this is the mark of being a Christian: John 13: 34b-35 "As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Again, he tells us in John 15:9-17 "This is my command: Love each other." We must love all our neighbors.

So, who is our neighbor? Jesus tells us in Luke 10: 25-37 the familiar story of the good Samaritan. A man is beaten and robbed on the road and passed-by by a number of good Jews and finally helped by a Samaritan. The Samaritans and Jews were not on good terms so this was an especially telling story. Jesus asks the question "Which of these do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The answer is the one who had mercy, the Samaritan. And Jesus tells us to go and do likewise. We are to help everyone. Not just those we know and already love. The love Jesus is asking us to practice applies to all people.

Even our enemies. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:43-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" We are to love everyone.

And Jesus will help us to do that. Jesus promises us the help of the Holy Spirit to those who keep his commandment to love. "If you love me, keep my commands. And I will

ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” John 14: 15-16, 21

We are to love all people. We are to show them mercy as Jesus did and continues to do for us.

These are the great commandments. These are the cornerstones of our Christianity and the foundation of our Christian life.

Each week at the end of our service we are asked to go forth into the world in peace, hold onto that which is good, render evil to no one, help those in need, love and honor all people. Love is a verb. These are the actions we are given to do throughout the week.

Love is the work of the Christian. We need to be the love of Christ in the world. So, I thought I would end this morning with a blessing on us all as we do this work of love today and every day.

From a “Blessing of your work” by John O’Donohue:

May the light of your soul guide you.

May the light of your soul bless the work

You do with the secret love and warmth of your heart.

May you see in what you do the beauty of your own soul.

May the sacredness of your work bring healing, light and renewal to those

Who work with you and to those who see and receive your work.

May your work never weary you.

May it release within you wellsprings of refreshment, inspiration and excitement.

May the day never burden you.

May dawn find you awake and alert, approaching your new day with dreams,

Possibilities and promises.

May evening find you gracious and fulfilled.

May you go into the night blessed, sheltered and protected.

May your soul calm, console and renew you. Amen.

