

Mark 12:28-34
November 4, '18

“THREE MORE WORDS”

**SOMETIMES THINGS ARE SO EASY, THEY BECOME HARD.
I FOUND THAT TO BE TRUE THIS WEEK AS I LOOKED AT THIS
PASSAGE.**

**WHEN I FIRST SAW THIS AS OUR LECTIONARY GOSPEL READING,
I KNEW THIS WOULD BE AN EASY WEEK OF SERMON PREPARATION.**

**THERE WERE SO MANY DIRECTIONS TO TAKE – SO MANY GREAT
POSSIBILITIES WITH THIS PASSAGE.**

**FIRST OF ALL, IT’S A SUNDAY THAT FALLS IN THE MIDST OF OUR
STEWARDSHIP EMPHASIS & A GOOD TIME TO FOCUS ON OUR
COMMITMENT TO CHRIST & HIS CHURCH.**

**IT’S A GOOD TIME TO THINK ABOUT THE WAY IN WHICH WE ARE
CALLED TO PARTICIPATE – THROUGH OUR GIVING – IN EVERYTHING
THAT HAPPENS HERE.**

**WE BECOME PARTNERS WITH ONE ANOTHER IN SUPPORTING
THE WORK OF THE CHURCH BY DOING OUR FAIR SHARE – OUR FAIR
SHARE OF FINANCIAL GIVING & OUR FAIR SHARE IN THE GIVING OF
OUR TIME, OUR TALENTS & OUR ENERGY.**

**THIS PASSAGE TELLS US THAT GOD EXPECTS EVERY PART OF
YOU.**

**GOD EXPECTS YOU TO COMMIT YOUR HEART, YOUR SOUL, YOUR
MIND & YOUR STRENGTH TO SERVING YOUR CREATOR.**

**SO, YES, THIS PASSAGE EASILY FITS INTO A STEWARDSHIP OF
LIFE EMPHASIS TODAY.**

AND THEN THERE'S THE FACT THAT THIS IS THE VERY PASSAGE ON WHICH OUR CHURCH MISSION STATEMENT IS ENTIRELY BASED – “HEADS, HEARTS & HANDS FOR CHRIST IN SERVICE & CELEBRATION.”

AND THERE WE HAVE “THREE MORE WORDS.”

LAST WEEK, WE TALKED ABOUT THE THREE WORDS “ON THE WAY” AS WORDS THAT ARE SEEMINGLY INSIGNIFICANT & YET – UPON CLOSER EXAMINATION - HAVE A DEEP & PROFOUND MEANING IN OUR JOURNEY OF FAITH.

AND HERE, IN THIS PASSAGE, WE HAVE – IN ESSENCE – THREE MORE WORDS THAT ARE EQUALLY DEEP & PROFOUND.

YOU CAN SUM UP WHAT JESUS HAS SAID HERE WITH THOSE THREE WORDS – “HEADS, HEARTS & HANDS.”

“HEADS, HEARTS & HANDS FOR CHRIST IN SERVICE & CELEBRATION.”

SO PREPARATION FOR THIS SERMON SHOULD HAVE BEEN AS EASY AS IT COULD POSSIBLY BE.

AND THEREIN LIES THE PROBLEM.

IT WAS *TOO* EASY.

I FOUND THAT EITHER OF THOSE DIRECTIONS WOULD HAVE BEEN A GOOD ONE TO TAKE, BUT TO TRY TO COMBINE THEM WOULD SIMPLY CREATE A HODGE-PODGE & UNDERMINE THE IMPORTANCE OF BOTH.

SO I'VE DECIDED TO ABANDON AN EMPHASIS ON THOSE TWO THEMES & JUST FOCUS ON THE PASSAGE ITSELF.

HERE IN THESE VERSES WE FIND THE MOST POSITIVE ENCOUNTER IN THE ENTIRE GOSPEL JESUS EVER HAD WITH A SO-CALLED ADVERSARY.

THIS MAN ISN'T TRYING TO TRAP JESUS.

HE'S NOT TRYING TO TRICK HIM INTO SAYING SOMETHING THAT WILL LAND JESUS INTO TROUBLE WITH THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

HE HAS LISTENED TO JESUS & HE REALIZES THAT JESUS IS SPEAKING PROFOUND TRUTHS & HE ASKS HIM A GENUINE & SINCERE QUESTION.

HE WANTS JESUS TO TELL WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT IN BEING A PERSON OF FAITH.

YOU SEE, THERE WERE 613 PRECEPTS IN JEWISH LAW.

613! YOU WERE EXPECTED TO KNOW THEM ALL & OBEY EVERY ONE OF THEM.

248 OF THOSE LAWS WERE POSITIVE & 365 WERE NEGATIVE.

IN OTHER WORDS, THERE WERE A LOT OF "THOU SHALTS" BY WHICH PEOPLE WERE EXPECTED TO LIVE & AN EVEN GREATER NUMBER OF "THOU SHALT NOTS."

THIS MAN WANTED JESUS TO CUT THROUGH IT ALL & TELL HIM WHAT WAS MOST IMPORTANT IN THE LAW.

JESUS STARTS BY GIVING HIM A RELATIVELY SAFE RESPONSE.

HE GIVES HIM THE SHEMA FROM DEUTERONOMY: "HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE; YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND & WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH."

THIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED.

THIS WAS, AFTER ALL, THE FIRST PRAYER THAT JEWISH CHILDREN ARE TAUGHT TO SAY.

THE SHEMA (WHICH MEANS “LISTEN” – THE FIRST WORD OF THE PASSAGE) HAS BEEN CALLED “*THE QUINTESSENTIAL EXPRESSION OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF & COMMITMENT OF JUDAISM.*”

SO FAR, SO GOOD.

EVERYONE AROUND JESUS NODS IN AGREEMENT – “*SURE, THAT MAKES SENSE. WE SAY THOSE WORDS EVERY MORNING WHEN WE RISE & EVERY NIGHT WHEN WE RETIRE. WE KNOW THOSE WORDS EXACTLY AS HE HAS STATED THEM.*”

AH, BUT JESUS ISN’T FINISHED.

HE SAYS, “*THE SECOND IS THIS: ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ THERE IS NO OTHER COMMANDMENT GREATER THAN THESE.*”

WHAT JESUS HAS DONE HERE IS REVOLUTIONARY!

HE HAS TAKEN A VERSE FROM LEVITICUS – AND ELEVATED IT TO THE VERY STATUS OF THE SHEMA!

HE NARROWS THE ENTIRE LAW DOWN TO JUST THE SHEMA - BUT THEN HE ADDS A NEW TWIST TO IT.

“*LOVING GOD & LOVING OTHERS.*”

THIS IS THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL.

NOTICE THAT JESUS DOESN’T JUST SAY, “*LOVE THE LORD WITH YOUR HEART, SOUL, MIND & STRENGTH.*”

HE SAYS, *ALL YOUR HEART, ALL YOUR SOUL, ALL YOUR MIND AND ALL YOUR STRENGTH.*

THIS IS SIGNIFICANT.

GOD DOESN’T EXPECT A PIECE OF YOU.

GOD DOESN’T ASK FOR THE LEFTOVER TIME, THE LEFTOVER COMMITMENT, THE LEFTOVER DEVOTION, THE LEFTOVER MONEY.

HE WANTS ALL OF YOU – ‘YOUR HEAD, YOUR HEART & YOUR HANDS IN SERVICE & CELEBRATION.’

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF THE RECENT DEATH OF EUGENE PETERSON – THE PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER WHO IS THE ONE WHO GAVE US THE TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE KNOWN AS THE MESSAGE.

I LOVE THE WAY PETERSON HAS TRANSLATED THIS PASSAGE.

HE SAYS, “...LOVE THE LORD GOD WITH ALL YOUR PASSION & PRAYER & INTELLIGENCE & ENERGY.”

BUT THAT’S NOT THE ONLY PLACE THAT PETERSON IS HELPFUL IN THIS PASSAGE.

I DON’T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I’VE ALWAYS BEEN TROUBLED BY THE REACTION OF THIS SCRIBE TO THE ANSWER JESUS OFFERS TO HIS QUESTION OF WHICH IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT.

IT SEEMS AS THOUGH HE HAS ELEVATED HIMSELF ABOVE JESUS – AS THOUGH HE’S REALLY TESTING HIM – WHEN HE SAYS, “YOU ARE RIGHT, TEACHER...” – AS IF HE HAS THE AUTHORITY TO GIVE JESUS A PASSING GRADE ON THE EXAMINATION.

PETERSON GIVES US A DIFFERENT SLANT WHEN HE TRANSLATES THE SCRIBE’S RESPONSE AS – “A WONDERFUL ANSWER, TEACHER! SO LUCID & ACCURATE...”

IT’S REALLY AS IF HE’S SAYING, “THANK YOU FOR HELPING ME UNDERSTAND THINGS BY MAKING IT SO VERY CLEAR!”

SO, AGAIN, THIS MAN WHO WOULD SEEM TO BE AN ADVERSARY, IS REALLY GENUINELY COMING TO JESUS TO DISCOVER WHERE THEY HAVE COMMON GROUND – WHERE THEY CAN UNITE TOGETHER IN WHAT’S MOST IMPORTANT IN LIFE.

THEY MAY HAVE HAD DIFFERENT OPINIONS ABOUT OTHER THINGS, BUT WHEN IT CAME TO THE MOST IMPORTANT MATTERS IN LIFE, THEY AGREED COMPLETELY.

IS THAT NOT A VALUABLE LESSON FOR OUR OWN DAY & AGE?

LET'S FACE IT – WE ARE LIVING IN A PERIOD OF TIME THAT IS AS CONTENTIOUS AS ANY OF US CAN EVER REMEMBER.

THIS SCRIBE & JESUS – TWO MEN WHO LOGICALLY WOULD HAVE BEEN AT ODDS WITH ONE ANOTHER – TWO MEN WHO REPRESENTED DIFFERENT WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE WORLD – FOUND COMMON GROUND & ENGAGED IN A VERY PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATION – A CONVERSATION THAT FOR 2,000 YEARS HAS GUIDED US IN OUR OWN THINKING ABOUT WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT IN LIFE.

THEY EMBRACED ONE ANOTHER – IF NOT LITERALLY, THEN SURELY FIGURATIVELY – IN FOCUSING ON THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER.

WHAT A WONDERFUL CHALLENGE FOR ALL OF US IN THESE TROUBLED & DIVISIVE TIMES.

HOW MIGHT WE MODEL THAT SAME LOVE, SENSITIVITY, UNDERSTANDING & GRACIOUSNESS?

LAST WEEK, SUSAN PARSONS TALKED ABOUT THE INSEPARABLE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHURCH & GIVING.

“CHURCH & GIVING IS LIKE PEANUT BUTTER & JELLY,” SHE SAID, “YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER.”

JESUS HAS GIVEN US ANOTHER INSEPARABLE CONNECTION – THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LOVING GOD AND LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR.

YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER.

IT'S LIKE HINGES ON A DOOR.

ONE HINGE DOESN'T WORK.

IF YOU'VE EVER TRIED IT, YOU KNOW THAT'S TRUE.

**BOTH HINGES ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT IN ENABLING A DOOR
TO OPEN.**

OUR CAPITAL CAMPAIGN THEME FOCUSES ON DOORS.

WE'RE "OPENING THE DOORS TO OUR FUTURE."

**LIKE ANY OTHER DOOR, THAT DOOR TO OUR FUTURE MUST
HAVE TWO HINGES.**

WE OF THE PRESENT ARE ONE HINGE.

THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US ARE THE OTHER.

**WE OF THE PRESENT MUST JOIN WITH THOSE OF THE PAST TO
ENABLE THE DOORS OF THE FUTURE TO OPEN.**

**IN A SIMILAR WAY, WHAT JESUS HAS GIVEN US IN THIS PASSAGE
IS TWO HINGES – HINGES THAT MUST GO TOGETHER IF WE WANT TO
OPEN THE DOOR TO A PRODUCTIVE & FULFILLED LIFE.**

**LOVING GOD IS ONE HINGE – LOVING OUR
NEIGHBOR IS THE OTHER.**

**FOR THE SAKE OF OUR POLARIZED SOCIETY – FOR THE SAKE OF
OUR OWN PERSONAL PEACE & FULFILLMENT – LET US OPEN THE
DOORS TO A BETTER TOMORROW BY TRULY LOVING GOD & LOVING
OUR NEIGHBOR WITH ALL THAT WE HAVE AND ALL THAT WE ARE.
AMEN.**

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