

Matt 22:34-46

This passage today comes at the end of Matthew's gospel as we end this church year in Matthew and in a couple of weeks we'll move into the gospel of Mark.

Here Jesus's conflict with the Religious and Political leadership is reaching its climax. Jesus is becoming a profound threat to those in power and the current establishment. His purpose is not to do away with the laws God's people have followed but he comes to fulfil them and He means to take God's children back to the Spirit of the Law as God originally intended.

The leadership now becomes desperate and confront Jesus in public in an effort to discredit Him and therefore his message. And when asked about the most important law of all Jesus quotes Judaism's most fundamental, ancient and widely known and recited biblical passage...the Shema...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind found in Deuteronomy 6:5.

And unwilling to leave it simply as that... he adds Leviticus 19:18 when dealing with outsiders (aliens). You shall love your neighbor as yourself. And these two passages provide the summary of Jesus' mission and ministry here on earth...and it's also Holy Family's mission statement as well!

Both are very clear and indisputable! And both always get downplayed by the establishment (Then and Now) don't they? (Note also that in the first century love of self was taken for granted as a natural thing to do).

The Shema, the first prayer taught and recited by all Jews to include being placed upon the thresholds of their doorways (That's what's inside the Mezuzah if you didn't already know that) so that the people of God would never ever forget to put God (not the Laws) at the center of their lives...

And this Golden Rule is actually found in every world religion almost word for word...I wonder...Is this how we live our lives today? Today the

question we would need to ask ourselves is do we follow the USA or Christ...especially when they are in conflict with one another.

Our leaders today, just like then, try to package the two things together but it's not that simple...the kingdom of man is about power and wealth and the kingdom of God is about love...and you can't have it both ways...you have to choose like we talked about last week...money or relationships?

One separates and the other one unites...

And when you start threatening the system the system pushes back doesn't it?

I'm not sure where your politics and allegiances lie these days but when given a choice (and you call yourself a Christian) always apply the litmus test Jesus confronted in his nationalistic brothers back then...when in doubt and when you are confused always go back to Discipleship 101...the basics. Not the laws but the thing that's behind ALL the laws!

Love God and Love others... as you would do to yourself...if you wouldn't have it done to you or your family... then don't do it or let it happen to others...simple as that! Not too grey here!

Jesus' summary of the Law is strikingly similar to the answer Rabbi Hillel gave to the same question. According to the Babylonian Talmud (the way prior to the time of Christ), A man challenged the Rabbi to teach him the whole of Torah while standing on one foot...Rabbi Hillel answered on one foot...that which is despicable to you, do not do to your fellow, this is the whole of Torah. The rest is just commentary!

This is and will ALWAYS be the issue...and never confuse how we should ALL act EVERYDAY in every situation...and never confuse how we see those in power act as a way that we should conduct ourselves as well.

Never confuse Nationalism with following Christ...they won't line up no matter how much you try to rationalize it...yes we live in the kingdom of man temporarily (we all need to eat and pay bills) but while temporary residents

here don't ever forget that we are permanent residences of the kingdom of God eternally.

The kingdom of man lives by a golden rule too "He who has the gold rules"...and those with much would like to keep things exactly as they are...their abundance at the world and everyone else's expense.

Having said this and knowing that the people of the LAW will seek to throw the law back in your face and Jesus goes on to shoot holes at how they misunderstand and misuse the laws to favor themselves.

And our talking heads today either emphasize one side or the other. The right shouts Love the Lord your God...and the Left replies Love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus is an "AND" kinda guy...the way to break the paradox is to do both! Then you know your heart is in the right place. Looking at this as an equation, both are equal and the same thing. Doing one begets the other if done with the common denominator of Love...that's the key to the whole thing!

In quoting the Shema Jesus is pointing out the aim of the law to orient one's entire life towards God AND that one cannot love God without loving what God loves!

One cannot truly love God and oppress or exclude any of God's creatures...even those who we call an enemy. While the religious leaders used the laws to place severe limits on those who were recognized as their neighbors... Jesus joins these texts together to obliterate any and all limits on the term neighbor...in Leviticus the Hebrew term denotes the outsider...love the outsider as you would love yourself.

To love God is to love the way God loves... indiscriminately and without exception. Agape means to orient yourself towards the other openly and without judgement...to show empathy and compassion to all...to listen to opinions other than just reinforcing only your view of the world.

Because ultimately God is the source of all being and God loves all of God's creation and that means ALL...not just who we think is worthy of that love...it's not for us to make that choice.

Then Jesus quotes Psalm 110 verse 1. And Jesus raises the question about the Messiah's identity. Here what Jesus is pointing out is that although the Messiah is born in the line of David (think Kingdom of man)...that there is more to it...the Messiah is not simply the son of this man but the Messiah that has arrived and is standing in front of them transcends his lineage (think Kingdom of God).

They keep looking at things through the lenses of man and are actually looking through the wrong end of the telescope...Jesus continually tries to reveal to them God's perspective in the midst of all the Laws they now cling so dearly to...the Laws have now superseded what they were designed to be.

Laws at their heart are designed for folks to live in harmony and relationship with one another. What happens when people transgress against the community etc. The laws keep the connection and foundation of love and hold it all together. But at some point all Laws can become corrupted by those enforcing them and those in power... and the system and the Laws no longer unite all in relationship... rather they become obfuscated to favor some at others expenses... mmmmm...that's when things start to unravel.

Jesus...God wants us to make sure that we stay focused on the heart of the law and what they were designed for in the first place...so that all God's creatures could live in harmony with itself and have a foundation and grounding with Love at its center...

As our Presiding Bishop Curry is fond of saying...and it's so true and it's so simple

If it's not about love... then it's not about God!

KISS Keep it simple stupid...we have all lost our way and we need to get back to basics...harmony, peace, and love for all God's children and all of

creation...and that means ALL...Black or White; Republican or Democrat; Christian or Muslim; American or Immigrant...whatever!

ALL! And make sure that when you are looking at opposite viewpoints from your own then ask yourself...are you loving them as you would love yourself?

If it's not about love... it's not about God!

And God's purposes are greater than any single person; any single nation; any single religion. The Messiah's mission transcends the salvation of any particular group regardless of what anyone tells you.

Those who love God must love all of God's creatures, and sometimes that can even come at the expense of our own privileges.

Those who truly would follow Christ and would call themselves disciples must subordinate their particular interests, identities and purposes to our Savior's greater universal mission. Jesus refuses to identify love of God with any rigid religious or national requirements or to identify faithfulness to Himself with loyalty to any particular group of people.

Here Jesus calls out the Jewish people awaiting their hope in the Davidic line...it's intense and it's nationalistic...Here in the US with COVID and so many crisis' we face today we also wait the hope of Jesus' coming again...but be very careful what you wish for...Jesus points out that God is not Lord of the Jews or the Christians or the Americans...God is Lord of ALL! And God Loves ALL!

As Jesus now approaches the cross...this discourse happens on Monday of Holy week...Jesus makes it loud and crystal clear what it means to love God and be a follower of the Messiah...Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are all members of my family, you did it to me!

As we end the church year next week in Matthew's gospel on all saints day we start with Jesus' earliest teachings before he began his journey towards the cross...the Beatitudes...Jesus describes what it looks like to be oriented in this

fashion...oriented towards the kingdom of God...and today Jesus drives it home...Love God AND Love the other...Period...if it's not about Love then I promise you it's not about God!

Today we celebrate and pray for all of our own health...and we are especially thankful today for God's healing presence in our lives...only a few months ago our beloved deacon...our sister Naomi, almost went to her permanent place of residency... leaving us all at a loss and leaving us hurting.

Today here she is...she's back... hanging out with us a little while longer...Thank God for her presence with us today...that's a gift!

Today many here... and many in the world are still hurting! Let us pray for healing and for God's unity and peace in all God's world!

And let us ever always keep our orientation towards God... and towards love...

And the hope...the hope is that God's good creation can be experienced by everyone... while we travel together on this short vacation here... that we call life...

We thank God today that we can share time together right now...in this community... and in this place on this small spinning planet dancing through time and space.

So while were here...always make it about love my brothers and sisters...while we are here together...make it about God...and always... always choose love!

Your faithful servant,
carmen