

**SERMON FOR NOVEMBER 4, 2012**  
**REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY/COMMUNION**

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: **Mark 12:28-34 (Focus)**

Message: **"Love God with all Heart, Soul & Mind—  
Love Your Neighbor as Yourself!"**

Kekapa P.K. Lee



## **Gathering in the Word**

It seems so easy—doesn't it?

- ✓ Love God!
- ✓ Love your neighbor!

**The two greatest commandments sum up the core of the Christian faith** and could – if we really were to trust God – transform the world! The relationships between Jesus and the religious leaders of his time were tense, edgy and uneasy. This uneasiness is even evident today as we head to the elections this coming Tuesday. So I encourage everyone to go and vote on Tuesday if you already have not voted!”

## **Hearing the Word**

Mark 12:28-34 (NIV 2011)

### ***The Greatest Commandment***

<sup>28</sup> One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” <sup>29</sup> “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>31</sup> The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>[c]</sup> There is no commandment greater than these.” <sup>32</sup> “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. <sup>33</sup> To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” <sup>34</sup> When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

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Here today in our Mark 12 scripture—Jesus finds himself to be the target of a media blitz. If it was today—Jesus would be hounded by the paparazzi photographers and having cameras “put-in-his-face” every time he made a statement! Everyone wanted to ask Jesus a question—starting with the movers and shakers of the religious establishment in Jerusalem who tested Jesus’ theological guts and bravery and spirit—by asking Jesus a series of questions:

**They wanted to get Jesus into trouble!**

- ✓ “By whose authority do you do these things?”
- ✓ “Should we heed the Roman IRS and pay taxes to the Caesar or does God come first?”
- ✓ “When the resurrection happens, who gets the girl in case she married seven guys from the same family?”

Calmly and deliberately Jesus answers each question. Reporters scribbled down what he said as the TV cameras were running. And the *wise persons* in the crowds who listened and smirked and smiled at how well Jesus was answering and getting himself off the hook with which the authorities were trying to trap him!

Finally one teacher of the law asks the ultimate question—remembering that these teachers’ sole focus was to keep the Law of God peerlessly (meaning ‘without equal’): “Of all the commandments—which is the most important?”

Today for us—we’d think of the 10 commandments. But the people in Jesus’ day knew better. The strictest people among the Pharisees (*members of an ancient Jewish religious group who followed the Oral Law in addition to the Torah and attempted to live in a constant state of purity*) paid heed to and punished those persons who didn’t—somewhere in the neighborhood of 613 commandments! (I have the list if you ever want to see it sometime-let me know!)

Jesus chose and selected a commandment that in one fell swoop encompassed the entire list of 613 commandments because it undergirded and supported the entire list!

So Jesus quotes the Jewish *Shema* (*the confession of faith made by the Jews*) from **Deuteronomy 6:5**; and then adds “with all your mind” and so says, <sup>29</sup> ***“The most important one, is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this from (Leviticus 19:18): ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”***

Jesus is saying to us that there’s a strong chord—a golden thread—a connection—that connects God’s every desire for our lives in God’s Creation with a fundamental and basic love for God and neighbor!

Did we hear this sisters and brothers!?

In our everyday actions we can either trace what we say and what we do along that thread and so let it lead back to the Love that is supposed to permeate our every action and word *or* we find that the tread snaps at some point and we’re left with just a frayed edge that doesn’t end up being loving at all!

What undergirds and supports our love *if* God’s great Love and that even as that Love was able to reach out to us “while we were yet sinners,” so there is more than enough grace in that Love to forgive our failures so love now—too.

We don’t rest cheaply on that grace, nor do we to treat it as “cheap grace,” but we take comfort that the divine Love that lies at the heart of everything is always ready to assist us

**and push us toward a greater faithfulness in our desire to love God above all—and our neighbors as ourselves!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

### **Doing the Word**

So what is the **Word of God** for us this Remembrance and Holy Communion Sunday?

1. **ONE: In loving God, we truly love our neighbors; in loving our neighbors—we love God!**

Our relationship to God is always inextricable and always tied to our relationships with one another! **AND THIS IS TRUE FOR US AT TFCCCH!!** Notice—that a single principle was insufficient for Jesus. **It's not enough to love God and neglect our neighbors—for we cannot love God without loving one another! The reverse is also true!** The greatest commandment is holistic in nature: **In loving God, we truly love our neighbors; in loving our neighbors—we love God!**

2. **TWO: Love God Most Deeply!**

So how will we love God and neighbor this coming Tuesday? **We vote like a Christian when we vote for the sake of our neighbors and those the world and politicians are most likely to neglect. In doing so—we love God most deeply!**

- ✓ We vote with forgiveness, love and grace in our hearts towards our neighbors but especially with those who we disagree.
- ✓ We vote without commitment to political ideologies or personalities.
- ✓ We vote without expecting mere mortals to do the work of God.

- ✓ Yet we vote with hope that God will meet us in the messiness of our political lives.
- ✓ We vote with expectation that the reign of God is indeed at hand.
- ✓ **We vote like a Christian when we vote for the sake of our neighbors and those the world and politicians are most likely to neglect. In doing so—we love God most deeply!**

3. **THREE: A Theocentric—GOD CENTERED—ethic has no outsiders!**

- ✓ Our care for our neighbor and the stranger is our contribution to the quality of God's experience.
- ✓ Our harm of our neighbor and the stranger detracts from the beauty of God's experience.
- ✓ **Aligned with God's vision-our love of self and stranger as well as neighbor enables God to be more active in our neighborhoods and world!**

As we all follow Christ's Way—this encourages and forms us —TFCCH—into self-aware loving and caring people; committed to abundance for others and ourselves even if it means suffering! The dynamic interplay of love of God, self, and neighbor affirms that our love of self and neighbor makes a difference to God.

- ✓ Our lives are gifts to God!
- ✓ There are no insiders and outsiders!
- ✓ When we practice this—we enable God to be more active in our Church, our neighborhoods and world!

**Sent in the Word** - Story: *"That's Just The way you are!"*

"That's just the way you are," she said.

It was like it was the first nice thing anyone ever said to me. I know that isn't true. People always say nice things. I just never feel comfortable

hearing them. But there was something about this. Perhaps something I needed to hear. Maybe something I longed to hear again, but with a different tone.

It was Administrative Professionals Day and although we had already made plans for gifts and a small lunch, I wanted to thank them in my own way. So I purchased two small potted mums on my way to work that morning. I walked in the door and handed one to each of the two wonderful ladies who do so much for all of us, but it was their friendship I was acknowledging today.

They were both very appreciative. Later after the celebration ended one told me she had forgotten what day it was. So this really was a wonderful surprise. It would be the very next day that what I had done would return to me hundred fold. When I walked in the door that morning, I was greeted with the same beautiful smile I saw each day. "Bob, I just wanted to tell you how great it was for all that was done yesterday," she said. "Well, you deserve that and more!" I replied. "I was telling my sister how surprised I was. I said you had walked in with flowers and thought nothing of it, because that's just the way you are. I mean you do things like that all the time," she said.

I was stunned. I heard, "that's just the way you are," and stopped listening.

From that point on I had the most incredible day. It may be hard to understand this, but I don't have a lot of great days. Oh, the days are always great, but my attitude toward them isn't. Shocked to hear me say that? It's true.

Monday through Friday I watch ABC News. At the end of the news cast Charlie Gibson always says, "I hope you had a good day." Some days tears run down my face. That day I rushed into the living room just to hear him say it.

"I did, Charlie! I did!" I shouted.

When the darkness of night came blanketing my bedroom, lying there I tried to figure out why this one particular day was so incredible. It was because Ann Marie said, "that's just the way you are." I realized that she saw me as one who would do such things just because. That I was caring enough to do something, or show love to someone because I wanted to. I have been that way all of my life. I was always the kid who shared whatever money I had, candy I bought, or time I had available with people who needed it more than I did.

But no one ever recognized that. No one. The only other time I heard it was when, while going through my divorce, my first wife told my son Keith, "That the way your father is, he wants to save the world."

She didn't mean it in a nice way. I do, by the way. I want to save the world.

So, last Friday, when I walked into the office I knelt down next to Ann Marie. I told her, "Although I am an inspirational writer and speaker, I have a poor self image. I do lots of things for lots of people. Many are perfect strangers. When you said, "That's just the way you are," you validated me." I then went on to explain that she was responsible for the first really incredible day I had in awhile.

"Just the way you are." Look at the power of acknowledging something good in someone. Look at the impact a simple expression had on me. She helped me to see what she saw in me. The me I struggle to be!

If someone would say those words about you, what would they mean? Because, "That's just the way you are."

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