

SERMON FOR NOVEMBER 1, 2015

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i

United Church of Christ

Remembrance Sunday/The Lord's Supper

Scripture: Mark 12:28-34

Message: **"Love, Love, Love!"**

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GATHERING IN THE WORD OF GOD

Today is Remembrance Sunday as we remember the saints in our Church who were faithful to their Family and to God and Church in their own ways. It's a time to continue and grieve on this day but also to rejoice for their lives with us and the difference they made. They live on with God and in us. We affirm that with God—nothing of value is ever lost and whatever is loved shares in God's everlasting life!

Also—we are reminded in our Gospel of Mark 12 lesson—we are to love God as well as ourselves. We cannot care for others if we don't take care of our self! Also, if I do not love myself I cannot love others!

HEARING THE WORD OF GOD

Mark 12:28-34 (The VOICE Bible)

²⁸ One of the scribes *who studied and copied the Hebrew Scriptures* overheard this conversation and was impressed by the way Jesus had answered.

Scribe: Tell me, Teacher. What is the most important thing that God commands *in the law*?

Jesus: ²⁹ The most important commandment is this (Deut. 6:4): "*Hear, O Israel, the Eternal One is our God, and the Eternal One is the only God.*" ³⁰ *You should love the Eternal, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*"

³¹ The second *great commandment* is this: "*Love others in the same way you love yourself.*" There are no commandments more important than these.

Although Jesus is asked for only the single most important commandment, He answers by naming two commands: love God and love others. He includes both because these two teachings can never be really separated from each other. Some people think they can love God and ignore the people around them, but Jesus frequently makes it clear that loving God apart from loving His people is impossible.

Scribe: ³² Teacher, You have spoken the truth. For there is one God and only one God, ³³ and to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves are more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice *we could ever give.*

³⁴ Jesus heard that the man had spoken with wisdom.

Jesus: *Well said; if you understand that, then the kingdom of God is closer than you think.*

Nobody asked Jesus any more questions after that.

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A teacher of the law asks Jesus the ultimate question—especially for religious folks whose sole focus is keeping the Law of God perfectly: **“Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”**

We today would probably think of the 10 Commandments. But the folk in Jesus’ days knew better. The strictest folks among the Pharisees paid heed to—and punished infractions (*breaches, violations,*

trespasses, law-breaking) **somewhere in the neighborhood of 613 commandments!**

That's a lot of commandments!

(For a look see of those commandments:
<http://www.jewfaq.org/613.htm>)

From all those commandments Jesus cites and chooses a couple of the commandments near the top of that long list and quotes the ***Shema*** (*The Jewish Statement and confession of faith*) from **Deuteronomy 6 and its call to know that God is one and that our highest duty is to love God with everything we've got! And oh yes—right next door to that commandment is the one that says to love your neighbor, too, because—you can't say you love God but then hate all those folks that God surrounds you in your everyday life!**

This commandment encompassed and covers the entire list of the 613 commandments!

We must truly love God **and** love others—the welfare of neighbors—a group of people that includes strangers within your gates and fences and most anyone else you ran across anywhere in your life—**your love for God has to transfer to those people, too, or you'd find all kinds of ways to avoid and by-pass your obligations toward these folks too!**

In our Gospel of Mark—avoiding, evading, by-passing, ducking the law was a common thing among the hyper-religious folks of Jesus' day. Jesus meant what he said

about love being our highest obligation. The folks' own efforts to use the law as a bludgeon and club revealed their own lack of love!

Most of us here today are pretty sure we have our pious, devout, and dutiful act together. We love God! And we love our neighbors—well most of them! We like most of the people we work with daily. Even some of our fellow Christians in Church can be real jerks sometimes!

Question: Can we “love” people without being obligated and compelled to love them? Maybe my **not** talking with them is the most loving thing I could do—after all!

Maybe. And maybe not!

Jesus says to us that there is a strong chord—a golden thread—that connects God's every desire for our lives in God's Creation with a fundamental and important love for both God and neighbor! In our everyday actions, we can *either* trace what we say and what we do along that thread and so let it lead it back to the love that is supposed to permeate and fill our every action and word *or* we find that the thread snaps at some point and we're left with just a frayed edge that doesn't end up being loving at all!

The bad news is that we run into that kind of fraying on a pretty regular basis. We need to remember every day—that what undergirds and supports our love is 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 God's Love to forgive us our failures of love now too!

We don't rest cheaply on God's grace—nor do we treat it as "cheap grace," but we take comfort that God's Love that lies at the very heart of everything is always ready to assist us and goad and provoke us toward greater faithfulness in our desire to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves!

Probably the only real mistake we can make in all this is precisely the thought that since we are mostly loving towards most people, we are all set on that front! They're Pharisees, after all, and were aware that they were not quite loving towards everyone but found clever ways to skirt and avoid all that as a way to avoid fixing what was broken in their hearts of hearts. They didn't take comfort in God's grace so much as they convinced themselves they didn't need any grace and forgiveness in this area to begin with!

And that—sisters and brothers is a difficulty that may well prevent a person from being interested in entering Jesus' kingdom (itself a gift of grace) much less dwelling happily within the kingdom.

DOING THE WORD OF GOD

So what is God's Word for us today?

1. ONE: THERE IS SO MUCH WE CAN DEAL WITH IN THE CONTEXT OF LOVE.

- We can forgive people easier where love is!
- We can put up with foibles and weaknesses, faults and shortcomings where love is!

- We also find it flat out possible to go on with our life in a rough world when love is present!
- But take away love—and we wither and crash. We can't go on. We're damaged beyond repair.
- Other ideas?

2.TWO: THE BIBLE IS OUR NEW REALITY!

- The B-I-B-L-E is our faith reality; a new and different way for us being human that is really a fulfillment of what God intends for us!
- We love God by loving our neighbors!
- We show God's love by our actions and by what we do!
- We are to be Christian and not just nice!

3.THREE: WE THE PEOPLE OF TFCCH ARE TO LOVE GOD, LOVE OTHERS, AND LOVE SELF!

- We are to keep walking according to God's commandments.
- This kind of love generously chooses the interests of another!
 - Love is more than words.
 - Love is more than deeds.
- We are to exchange our value system(s) for God's. God values all people—so too should we.
- Love is based on forgiveness. For us to love others, we must ourselves first experience and rest in God's love and forgiveness through Christ and forgive others as God has forgiven us in Christ!

- Love is the “measuring cup” of my true spiritual condition and the reality of my intimacy with God.

SENDING IN THE WORD OF GOD

How different would our neighborhoods and our Church be if—instead of constantly striving for our own freedom and self-actualization—we gave our energies to making our loved ones safer, freer, and more whole? The paradox and irony is that when we begin to truly love and start to put the needs of others before our own—our own needs are more easily and fully satisfied. Learning to love really is the best way to discover the abundant life that Jesus offers us!

Finally: “There is no commandment greater than these: We are to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. The second commandment is this: “Love others in the same way you love yourself.” There are no commandments more important than these!

Amen! Alleluia! Thanks be to God!