

Wholehearted love for God and loving your neighbor as yourself

10th Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity – Israel Sunday

Mark 12:28 – 34



The Great Commandment

28 And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. 33 And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 And when Jesus saw that he

answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

When two people disagree, the argument can lead to positive new insights or compromises. But arguments can also lead people to become even more entrenched in their positions or to behave with hatred and animosity toward others. Shortly before Jesus went to Jerusalem to be crucified, there were heated arguments concerning the Sabbath, the resurrection of the dead, and Jesus' right to heal the sick and forgive sins. But more than anything else, it was about who Jesus really was.

In this conversation with Jesus, many questions emerge, such as, "Who is the living God and what does He want from us," and "What about all the people with their many needs?" A scribe joins them, who asks honest questions and is seeking God. Perhaps he sensed and was seeking a simple love for God. But now, everything was blurred by arguments and many questions, and he was unsettled. And perhaps he asked himself the question: "Where is God in all of this, and what does he want from me?" Are you familiar with this feeling--the experience of being close to God, where everything is crystal clear, the times when you know that God wants you exactly where you are? Then suddenly, things become unclear. Your family argues, you can't get through to your child and don't know how to help him. You ask, "God, where are You in all of this?" Perhaps this scribe felt something like this. He asks honestly from a place of deep need: "What is the most important commandment? What can sustain us? What can I be sure of?"

Jesus gives the scribe a very simple answer, one that every Jew must have known from childhood: love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and secondly, love your neighbor as yourself. It's that simple. Everything else flows from this twofold commandment to love. Loving God with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our strength is both a simple and personal way of life that shapes our entire everyday life. God wants to reign over my will and life. God wants us to serve Him wholeheartedly. In this way, our faith in God becomes an integral part of our daily lives, which is precisely where we meet our neighbor. Our neighbor is the one God places before us—the child I no longer understand, the elderly person who begins to talk nonsense. Whoever says the twofold commandment to love is easy to keep because it is simple is fooling themselves. Questions and doubts will arise. Isn't unconditional love considered sacrificing yourself or even being weak? Some Christians, in a misguided love for their neighbor, have even abandoned the tenets of Christianity so as not to offend other religions. So, we begin to reason: "Who is my neighbor?" another scribe critically asked, and "To what extent may I love him?"

With our neighbor, we are confronted with worldliness and the limitations and failings of humanity, which is precisely where Christ's simple commandment to love becomes clouded. But let's not put the cart before the horse. First, we go to God! Our love is not our own. It not only begins with God, but it is God's love. God is the source. God gives me love first before I can go to the other person.

So, everything begins with God, and God wants us to love him wholeheartedly, which is precisely where we mess things up by mixing God with general human ideas. For example, we might say, "Of course we all believe in God in some way--the main thing is that we do good to others!" This thought is not wholehearted love for the one true God! People who "believe in God in some way" can be found everywhere. They come in all shapes and sizes and are even on the rise. "I do believe in a higher being..." said an acquaintance who has been through all the atheistic tricks of the trade. And then there are the numerous meditation groups that not only want to free one from everyday stress, but promise an total experience of God, but which actually have nothing to do with God. Not to mention the people who commit murder and manslaughter in God's Name, so that His honor is preserved.

No, all of that is far from the Kingdom of God. And Jesus means something else entirely. When Jesus speaks of the love of God, it is not "believing in some way", nor is it a faith that fools the senses with incense and fuzzy, warm feelings. It is also certainly not a faith that violently ambushes the souls of others. No! From beginning to end, love for God has flesh and blood. It is very tangible and says with every heartbeat: love, love, love. It teaches us to pray, "Abba, dear Father!" And all of this is not just a feeling but was carved in stone with the Ten Commandments. Firm, clear, tangible and, finally, reasonable. Rules that are clear and understandable for all people, which can be figured out with common sense. If everyone followed these rules, we would have a good life here on earth. The problem is that we twist and change God's wonderful commandments, which are truly a good plan for life. Instead of loving our neighbor, we confuse everything and turn it on its head. Just as the scribe had 613 commandments back then, so we have our excuses, half-truths, and apologies.

Those newly in love like to say that butterflies in their stomach are the height of love. Yes, the love between a man and a woman is divine! This love is also good and beautiful, and because it comes from God, it also bears his fingerprints. But love for one's neighbor without God often becomes a tragedy. Hormones cause fireworks, and reason is turned off. In the end, there are only unreasonable fights and a pile of hurt feelings. Both leave the relationship as losers, feeling unloved by God and the world. But you can approach this kind of love quite differently. When God is first in my life, then my partner is not just an object of my love and affection, but a wonderful gift from God. I can experience this miracle of God, and we can journey through life together, bearing with one another's weaknesses – in good times and bad. This is love because God gives me that person to accompany me on my journey, and not just because my hormones are going crazy. That would be a truly sensible decision! The same applies when I hold my newborn child in my hands. Now that is truly a miracle and a gift from God! The child does not belong to me, but to God. I can imagine nothing better than placing this child back in God's arms when I bring him to baptism and daily bring him before God in prayer. The child is on loan and from God and is ultimately His.

What can be said about these very personal examples of intimate human interaction can also be said about every human encounter: every person who crosses my path is as much a gift from God as it is a responsibility. All are created in the image of God. God gave them to me so that my love for Him could take on flesh and blood. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself, despite all weaknesses and imperfections. God's love has flesh and blood and becomes tangible when we love others. This cannot be seen any more clearly than in Jesus Christ himself. Throughout his life, Jesus Christ testifies to his unbroken and wholehearted love for the heavenly Father. This love does not remain with Him, but in His encounters with others, he literally pours Himself out so that others can have a part in Him. And Jesus was not just anyone. He was and is God Himself among us! In Him, we see with absolute clarity both God's friendly face toward humanity and the wholehearted love of God himself. Jesus is the shining image of God in and for us! The scribe before Jesus understood all of this to some extent. Standing before Jesus, he could not only grasp with his mind what it means to love God, but there in the presence of Jesus, he could also sense the love of God that walks with us on the journey. "You are not far from the kingdom of God!" Jesus says to the scribe. All that's missing is the heartfelt prayer: "Abba, dear Father!" Then all will be made clear. Amen.