

## Mark 12:28-44

### Children's Sermon:

How many of you have rules at school and at home? Are there any rules you like? Are there any rules you don't like? Tell me what they are!

By the time Jesus started his ministry, there were hundreds of laws and rules. Some leaders tried to make some laws more important than others, some said all the laws were of equal importance. This caused the different leaders to argue with each other and not get along, even though they loved the same God.

But Jesus, when asked about what laws are the most important, had two! One was the summary of an old law which was to love God with all your heart, soul and mind. Say that with me:

"Love God with all your heart, soul and mind"

And Jesus added a new one. Love your neighbor as yourself. Say that with me:

"Love your neighbor as yourself"

God wanted people to remember to love God and to love others. We hear about a woman today that puts her love into action. Loving involves using our bodies. Can you help me form the letters for the word LOVE with your bodies?

**L** (each person sits up straight on the floor with legs out straight and arms above the head)

- *Look where we are sitting – on the floor. Love means being willing to get down wherever needed with people.*

**O** (form big Os with arms in front of you like a big hug)

- *Loving begins with caring about/ hugging people*

**V** (in pairs put feet toe to toe and lean back to form the letter V)

- *People have to trust each other to love each other*

**E** (Each person sits on floor with legs straight out, one arm bent at the elbow then straight out at the waist and the other arm straight out at shoulder height.)

- *This is harder to get into position. Loving is hard work. We have to be willing to glean in the hot sun, share our last meal, maybe even drop all we have in the offering plate.*

## Mark 12:28-44

### Adult Sermon:

What is the very best? I'm going to present you with a series of questions and I want you to think to yourself what is the very best. Ready? What is the very best...

- Flavor of ice cream? (rocky Road)
- Sports team? (Minnesota Twins)
- Movie? (Shawshank Redemption)
- Type of pet? (dog)
- Color in the rainbow? (blue)
- Book? (Dangerous Wonder by Mike Yacanelli)
- Thing to do on a warm day? (swim)
- Subject in school? (Math)
- Song? (Africa by Toto)
- Thing someone has ever said to you? (I love you)
- Bible story? (Paul's conversion on the Road to Emmaus)

In our reading today,— a scribe (who, by the way, was a big deal in the church. Scribes were in charge of studying the Jewish laws – hundreds of them! – transcribing the laws and interpreting them. Almost like lawyers in a sense. They held a high position in the church.) So a Scribe asks Jesus what the 'very best', or most important commandment or LAW is. Jesus – how do we sort through the hundreds of commandments offered in Holy Scripture? How shall we be judged? Which one is the very best? Which one should we really focus on to make sure that we get into heaven?

And Jesus responds by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19:18 – scripture references that were very familiar to these Jewish people.

He begins with Deuteronomy 6:4: Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is One; [Jesus continues] so 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.

Jesus points to this verse as the most important commandment of them all, and goes on to say that the second most important commandment is that we love our neighbors as ourselves.

Love God. And Love your neighbor. As simple as that.

This is not what the Jewish people expected to hear. Jesus reinterprets his tradition by calling people out of their reliance on physical sacrifices and obeying the Sabbath and hundreds of other laws, and calls them instead into an understanding that loving their neighbor IS loving God.

And kind of surprisingly, the scribe who asked the question agrees! The scribe says, "You're right, Jesus...this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices". And Jesus responded to the scribe "You are not far from the kingdom of God"...meaning "you get it!"

And then, Jesus begins to address those around him...telling them to beware of other scribes and high powered people who walk around in their fancy robes and have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor. Because behind the scenes, Jesus says, certain scribes are actually abusing their power...devouring widows' houses when they should be looking out for them...and praying long prayers only for the sake of appearance.

And in the 4<sup>th</sup> section of today's reading, Jesus holds such scribes, who flaunt their power, stature, and authority, in comparison to the poor widow who has nothing. Despite having nothing, this widow still is faithful. She has no power and not much money, but she gives all she has. This, Jesus says, is the true spirit of generosity, and the spirit of worship. This is what it means to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.

Jesus points out, it's not important how much money the widow gave, but what's more important is the value of her gift. Her last two coins were very valuable to her, so they were valuable to God.

What Jesus is saying is when we love God first, then all things are done out of that. When we love God first, we give out of that, we talk to others knowing that they are also children of God, we see the trees and the snow as not a nuisance, but as God's creation. A God that we love has made all things. Prayer becomes not something we have to remember to do, but something we GET to do! We GET to talk with the one we love! We GET to read the Bible so we can know God a little bit more! When we love God first, all of our actions are done because of this. All of our possessions are used for His sake...we don't give God our leftovers. You wouldn't give your children or your spouse or someone that you love the left overs...we give them all we can. We bend over backwards to make sure we are there for significant events in their life, when they are going through a hard time...to provide for them when they are struggling...to make sure they are happy and cared for. Do we show our love to God the same way that we show our love to others here on this earth?

Or have we fallen into a rut of giving God our leftovers? Our leftover time, our leftover money that we haven't spent yet? Our leftover love?

When my sister was at one of her rock bottom moments in her struggle with drugs and alcohol, she had been kicked out of the house in the morning but let back in by that night. She hadn't changed in those 12 hours. She wasn't turning her life around. And I remember asking my mom, "why are you letting her back in? you have to stick to your guns! You kicked her out".

And my mom turned to me, and said, "I can't. she is my daughter and I love her. I can not see her out on the streets when I have a roof over my head. I can't abandon her and give up all hope because I still love her and she is my child."

What does it mean to see the most vulnerable through the eyes of Christ? It's a different way of seeing.

When we are at our worst, we have a God who still takes us in and loves us no matter what. When we have screwed up and hurt others, we have a God who forgives us and says, "try again".

Jesus lifted up the poor widow who gave everything as an example of faithful giving and redefined love. It's not about how much money we put in the offering plate, or how many committees we are on, or how much time we spend volunteering at the foodshelf. Jesus turns the table on our understanding of generosity. The amount of giving is unimportant, but the reason we give is what matters. We have a God that gave his entire life for us. And it was done out of Love....are you willing to love God and love others in the same way?

It's about living out that first commandment. How we treat our neighbor...how we treat the most vulnerable...is living out loving the Lord our God with our whole heart and soul and mind. This is the kind of community to which God calls us ....to care for and love each other...just as we have been loved by God.

*Loving God,*

*Thank you for the journey that Jesus took to the cross. Help us to see our place on the road beside Jesus, focusing on his teachings and his actions. Thank you for the examples we see of people in our community showing love of God or neighbor. We pray for situations in which people could use a reminder to show more love of God or neighbor. Journey with us as we journey with you to the cross. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*