

Ever heard of an *elevator talk*? Basically, it is a very brief persuasive argument whose purpose is to secure a decision from someone in a short length of time. As in, the length of an elevator ride. In some forms of Christian evangelism, it takes form in a formulaic and brief invitation to faith that seeks an immediate response. As in: *here are the four spiritual laws; now, let's have a prayer and ask Jesus into your heart*. Whatever purpose an elevator talk has, it requires a whittling down of the matters at hand to the bare essentials. As in: first things first.

First things first. That is the gist of this encounter that appears in three gospels, each with slightly different takes and directions. Our task is not choosing two thousand years out whether Matthew or Mark or Luke come closest to Jesus's original words or setting. It is a matter of how (and why) “first things first” came to be heard and retold to the Church in their time . . . and ours.

There is substantial common ground in all three versions about what merits recognition as “first things first.” An opening question of what is the greatest of God's commandments finds the same answer in all three gospels: love, both of God and of neighbor. The answer of love is clear on one thing regarding faith: we don't get to cherry-pick between the two, as if we can confine ourselves to loving God OR loving neighbor. But the answer of love leaves another matter unresolved: what does it actually *mean* to love, whether God or neighbor?

For that, consider the wisdom of St. Forrest of Gump. In particular: *stupid is as stupid does*. Substitute “love” for “stupid” and we will be headed in the right direction. *Love is as love does*. Too many definitions of love tend to be passive in nature, feelings that remain on the interior of our lives. Such love as evoked in scripture requires embodiment. Love is not limited to what we feel about God or neighbor. Love flows in what we *do* about God and neighbor. Which is likely why, when Jesus is asked “who is my neighbor” at the end of this teaching in Luke, he does not launch into a definition of who neighbors *are*, but a story of what a neighbor *does*.

May we go and do likewise: love God, love neighbor . . . remembering love is as love does.

For Reflection and Action:

What elements of each of these gospels' tellings of “first things first” stand out for you; why?

You have 30 seconds to tell someone about what love of God and neighbor means; go!

How do you see these “first things first” of love embodied or needed at Our Saviours':

In our liturgical practices; in our missional activity?