

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
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Clarksburg, WV

Matthew 22:34-46

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37 & 39 N.R.S.V.)

If Jesus Tweeted

“Everyone says to follow your dreams, so I went back to bed.”

“Our scariest president was probably Rushmore, because he had four heads.”

“‘Fill’er up, please,’ I say as I pull my van up to the cat shelter.”

“Wait, what do you mean Jesus loves me? Did he say something to you?”

What do these lines have in common? Not much, except that they are tweets.

A tweet is a post on the social media application Twitter, usually about 33 characters in length. The challenge of a tweet is to say something funny or provocative or profound ... in just a few words. (Homiletics Magazine, October 25, 2020)

I have never gotten into Twitter myself, but I am told that it is one of the most popular forms of communication in our country today. Many people love the challenge of trying to say something profound or funny in such a short number of characters.

Someone recently wrote in Homiletics Magazine wondering if Jesus had Twitter back then, what might he have Tweeted? Perhaps he would have chosen to tweet from our text for today. “You shall love the Lord your God. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” That is just 74 characters. It would be the greatest tweet ever.

Of course, Jesus did more than just come up with a short powerful statement. He didn’t just talk about love, he lived love in all that he did.

In our scripture passage from today, the Pharisees have sent an expert in the Jewish law to trap Jesus. The lawyer asks Jesus which commandment in the law is the greatest? There were literally hundreds of little laws that the Pharisees observed. But probably the lawyer here expects Jesus to pick one of the 10 commandments. The trap is that no matter which commandment

Jesus picks, he will be leaving out something important. And he will look arrogant for picking one thing over another. It is a difficult question.

I am reminded of the young woman who was interviewing for acceptance into a very prestigious business university. The professor who was interviewing her said, I'm going to give you a choice. You can answer 10 easier questions or 1 very hard question. Which do you want to do?

She told him that she would take the one hard question. "Very well," he said. "Here is your question: What came first, day or night?"

The seconds ticked by as the young woman thought about her answer. Finally she looked up and said, "Day."

The professor scowled, "Why do you say that?"

The young woman smiled and said, "Ah, but that would be a second difficult question. You said I only had to answer one difficult question."

Jesus answered his question with equal success and then went a bit further. Instead of just stopping at the question asked, "What is the greatest commandment?," Jesus gives also the second greatest commandment. "Love your neighbor as yourself."

On these two commandments, says Jesus, rests all the law and the prophets. The young woman was able to escape a difficult question. But Jesus does more than that. He establishes the foundation for the law. Jesus says that the spirit of love is at the very center of who God is. Without that love, the law of God loses its meaning.

The lawyers and pharisees of the day were in love with the law rather than loving God. There is a profound difference. Many of us today also love the law more than we love God. There is a very good reason for that. It is not always easy to follow the law, but the law has clear limits. There is no struggle to figure out what is most loving. There is simply keeping the law. Or in the immortal words of Yoda, "There is only do or not do."

Jesus shook everyone up, when he said that whole hearted love of God and loving others as we love ourselves comes first.

The Jewish law was easier. Let me give you some examples. People often ask how much do I need to give to God in order to be a good follower of God? The Jewish law said, "Give 10% of your income and you are good." Jesus said, there is no limit. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. In other words, give your whole self over to God. Genuine love has no limit.

People ask, "How many times must I forgive someone?" The Jewish law said three times. If someone hurt you a fourth time, you could just write them off. When Peter asked Jesus that

question, Peter doubled the Jewish answer and added one extra, “How many times are we to forgive, master, as many as seven times?” Jesus said, “No, not seven, but, I tell you, seven times seventy.” If you are not a math whiz that would be 490 times. The thought is that if you forgive someone that many times, you are likely going to lose count. Again, love has no limit.

People sometimes ask, “If someone asks me for assistance, how much am I required to help?” I don’t know that there was a Jewish law that directly addressed that question. But then as now, it was assumed that there was a reasonable limit to such help.

In Luke 6:30 Jesus says, “Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.” So once again, Jesus says love has no reasonable limit. You see why the lawyers of that time, turned against Jesus. He was really shaking their world.

Looking back at our text from Matthew, we see Jesus now goes on the offense. He has answered their impossible question, now he asks them a difficult question. He asks them whose son the Messiah will be. They know the answer to this one. They say with confidence, “David’s son.” Jesus then points out that in Psalm 110, David calls the Messiah, “Lord.” How can that be?

Remember that in Jewish society of that day, the father was the lord of the house. The father was always the lord and master of his children, never the other way around. So how could David, the father of the Messiah refer to his son as, “my Lord?” The lawyers confronting Jesus are confounded and don’t know how to answer this question. One thing they know for sure is that Jesus knows the scriptures better than they do. So they back off for the moment.

It should be noted, however, that Jesus is not merely tricking his opponents back. He is telling them something important and profound. We modern Christians are well aware from the Christmas story that Jesus did come from the line of David. Both Matthew and Luke trace the genealogy of Jesus back to King David.

Jesus knew this too and he was not denying that reality. What he was doing was challenging the assumptions of the day. The assumption of the day was that the son would be like the father. So the pharisees were looking for the Messiah to be a King David 2.0 version. They were looking for an earthly king who would overthrow the hated Romans by military force and reinstate the nation of Israel as a world power.

Jesus was declaring that his rule as king would not be King David 2.0. Instead Jesus would bring in something so much greater that even King David would call him Lord and Master. Jesus was bringing in a kingdom of love, a kingdom without limits.

So here is the thing about modern tweets. There are a lot of people who can come up with clever tweets, and funny tweets, and profound tweets. But the tweet is not meaningful unless it is actually lived out.

Jesus did not merely tweet about a love without limits. He lived it. He loved us enough that he did not back down from God’s way even when he knew it would cost him the suffering death on

the cross. Jesus did not stop because the demand of love was unreasonable or too over the top. Jesus willing died for us and rose for us.

There is both challenge and power in this text for us today. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” And, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The challenge in this text is that it is very difficult to love like that. Fortunately for us, we have the power of the Holy Spirit to help us. We can’t live that kind of love by ourselves, but we don’t have to. God helps us.

There is also great power in this text. For the kind of love that is talked about here is a world changing kind of power.

Do you know anyone who shows that kind of love? One example of that for me is parents who are willing to adopt children and raise them as their own. I stand in awe of the love that takes. I stand even more in awe of the parents who are willing to adopt older children, and children with disabilities, and behavior problems.

These parents are the unsung heroes of the faith. They show us day in and day out the power of unconditional love. They show us a world changing depth of both joy and love. Not all of us are called to be adoptive parents, but we are all called to show that kind of love. We are all called, with God’s help and love, to be world changers.

Amen.