**“What Does Love Look Like”**

Good morning. This morning’s text is coming from the Mark 12:28-34. It is the passage about the greatest commandment. Worship is coming to us in a new format this morning. I am preaching in an empty sanctuary and you are worshiping in your living room or dining room, watching or listening on your computer or cell phone.

It is a new world and we are in a new and confusing and dangerous time. Some of you may even be angry that we are not all together in our beautiful sanctuary this morning, and I hear you and I understand your anger. I believe that this mornings scripture speaks to our current crisis, and even to the emotions that we are feeling, maybe even to that anger that I just spoke of. I invite you to turn in your bibles and follow along as I read from the Gospel of Mark, again, that is Mark 12:28-34.

**Mark 12:28-34.**

To put this passage in its context. Jesus is standing in the Temple in Jerusalem. It will not be long before he will be betrayed by Judas, arrested in Gethsemane, tried in a kangaroo court by the Sanhedrin, brought before Pontius Pilate, mocked, beaten and crucified. He is approached by a scribe, one who is well educated in the law and in the Hebrew scriptures. This man is one who can read and write. He is a member of a group who has been most adamantly opposed to Jesus, questioning his authority.

Yet, this scribe has been impressed with Jesus ability to hold his own with his colleagues as well the answers that Jesus has given. So, he steps forward, and he poses a question of his own.

“Jesus, my colleagues and others have raised some interesting issues, but let’s get down to the main issue. What is the greatest commandment? In other words, what matters most? What is most important?”

Jesus, being a good Jewish man, responded, “The greatest commandment of course is the Shema,

*“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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.’ The second "is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Love. Love God and love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We all know this commandment. Anyone who grew up in Sunday school was taught this commandment. We know it well. It wasn’t new with Jesus.

The great Talmudic sage Hillel was born in Babylonia in the first century BC. As a young man he came to the Holy Land to study Torah at the feet of the sages of Jerusalem. He was initially a very poor, but brilliant student, and became a famous Torah scholar and eventually the president of the Sanhedrin.

He is often mentioned together with his colleague, Shammai, with whom he often disagreed on the interpretations of Torah law: Shammai often follows the stricter interpretation, whereas Hillel tended toward a more lenient understanding of the law. In the great majority of cases, his opinion prevailed. Hillel encouraged his disciples to follow the example of Aaron the High Priest to "love peace and pursue peace, love all God's creations and bring them close to the Torah." Hillel was a very humble and patient man, and there are many stories that illustrate this.

One famous account in the Talmud tells about a gentile who wanted to convert to Judaism. This happened not infrequently, and this individual stated that he would accept Judaism only if a rabbi would teach him the entire Torah while he, the prospective convert, stood on one foot. First, he went to Shammai, who, insulted by this ridiculous request, threw him out of the house. The man did not give up and went to Hillel. This gentle sage accepted the challenge, and said:

"What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary—go and study it!"

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor, sounds a lot like love your neighbor as you love yourself. Rabbi Hillel and Jesus are thinking along the same lines. The whole of the Torah, the whole of the Law and the prophets is to love God and to love you neighbor.

And so, what does love look like. Well, I think we have heard enough sermons over the years to know that the love that Jesus and the New Testament writers is talking about is Agape love. This is not the warm, fuzzy love that we often think of from books, and TV shows. It is not the cuddling up with teddy bears and watching our favorite movie on TV.

Agape love is love in action. It is the tough love of doing something that is not easy. It is the kind of love that Jesus showed the Rich Man when he confronted him about his attachment to his stuff. Jesus did what we today would call an intervention, and he made the man take a hard look at himself. It wasn’t a feel good moment, and the man walked away dejected and sad.

Jesus loved Peter, when he called him Satan and told him to get back in line with the rest of the disciples and to quit tempting him to do what he knew he could not do.

Jesus loved James and John but told them they could not sit at his right and left when he came into his power and glory.

Jesus loved the Jewish leadership, but he would not let them continue to play their power games and oppress the widows cheating them out of their rightful inheritances. Jesus stood in the Temple and reminded the people he loved that it was not to be a place of manipulation, of power politics, but of worship and devotion.

Jesus’ love sometimes was an in your face, confrontational, repent for the kingdom of God is standing before you kind of love. It was not the kind of love we sometime promote which wants to protect everyone’s feelings at all costs. Rather justice and righteousness, care for the most vulnerable, and the love of one’s neighbor were more important than ritual.

Just as the scribe responded to Jesus, in verse 33, *“this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”*[[2]](#footnote-2) Standing there on the porch of the Temple, which represented all the action of Jewish worship of sacrifice and burnt offerings, near to the altar and the holy of holies, this scribe affirmed what all of the prophets before him declared, that God wants the heart more than sacrifice and ritual. He affirmed that the very temple activities of which he was involved were less important than the care of the widows that he should have been doing but was not.

In these times when we are faced with an unseen and deadly enemy that attacks the most vulnerable among us, we need to worship God with not just our bodies, but also our minds, our intellect, our common sense. God gave us wisdom. We need to use that wisdom by listening to the scientist at the CDC and other scientific laboratories that are studying this virus. They know more about this unseen enemy that you or me.

God created this wonderful world. And in this wonderful world there are dangerous thing. Things that may be advantageous to one creature, one animal, one organism, but poisonous to human beings. There are viruses and diseases out there that human beings have been dying from since the first human beings sinned against God. This is a new one. We do not know how to deal with this one yet.

There are no antibodies in our immune systems to battle it yet. The younger we are the more equipped our bodies are to fight it off. The older we are, the more vulnerable we are. That is a fact of life. Until we know how to fight it, we must be smart and do what the people who have the tools to fight it tell us to do. We must be smart. God expects us to do so.

God doesn’t want us filling this building to worship him if that would endanger those who are vulnerable. If one person would show up here and take this virus home to one who is at risk, we all would carry the guilt. Now is the time to be wise as God would have us be. Now is the time to love as God has loved us.

The Prophet Micah says it most humbly in Chapter 6 :

*With what shall I come before the Lord,*

*and bow myself before God on high?*

*Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,*

*with calves a year old?*

*7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,*

*with ten thousands of rivers of oil?*

*Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,*

*the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”*

*8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good;*

*and what does the Lord require of you*

*but to do justice, and to love kindness,*

*and to walk humbly with your God? [[3]](#footnote-3)*

Young people. If you are listening. Don’t be like those fools on the beach. You may be able to fight of the virus, but you can also carry it home to your grandparents, your aunts and uncles, those in your family who are vulnerable. It would be like carrying a live grenade into thanksgiving dinner and dropping it under the table.

So, what does love look like in times like these.

Well, love of neighbor looks like this.

Now is the time when God would expect us to care for our vulnerable neighbor by keeping them safe, by listening to the authorities, and by doing our part to slow down the virus.

We take care of our neighbor by doing what the people who are fighting on the front lines tell us to do.

We shelter in place – we stay home if we can. By not going out into public we reduce the risk of the virus spreading to our neighbors. By doing so we are loving those who are vulnerable.

We practice social distancing – we can love someone by keeping them safe and protecting them from catching the virus.

We can wash our hands. Good hygiene is always a good thing.

We can use the phone, email, and other forms of communication to stay connected.

We can be the community of faith, and be connected, and not have to touch physically. We are the community through our love of God.

Pray for one another. Call one another. Wave across the yard to one another. Email one another. Facebook one another. Facetime one another. Technology -- we have complained about it. Now it may truly be what keeps us connected.

These things are true. This will pass. The virus will not win.

In the words of Paul to the Romans

*What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33 Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36*

*37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. [[4]](#footnote-4)*

Pray – Love – and know that God holds you now and forever.

Praise be to God.

Amen.

1. [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nrsv?ref=BibleNRSV.Mk12.29&off=35&ctx=ed%2c+%E2%80%9CThe+first+is%2c+%E2%80%98~Hear%2c+O+Israel%3a+the+) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), Mk 12:29–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nrsv?ref=BibleNRSV.Mk12.33&off=141&ctx=ighbor+as+oneself%2c%E2%80%99%E2%80%94~this+is+much+more+im) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), Mk 12:33. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nrsv?ref=BibleNRSV.Mic6.6&off=34&ctx=res%0a(Cp+Am+5%3a24)%0a6+%E2%80%9C~With+what+shall+I+co) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), Mic 6:6–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nrsv?ref=BibleNRSV.Ro8.31&off=30&ctx=+in+Christ+Jesus%0a31%C2%A0~What+then+are+we+to+) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), Ro 8:31–39. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)