

Jesus's Creed and the Great Commandment

Mark 12: 28-31

This Lenten Season we will be pondering our most important personal beliefs. Our personal Credo, or I Believe. It is more than an intellectual enterprise. William Sloane Coffin in his book *Credo*, writes, “Credo— I believe — best translates, ‘I have given my heart to.’”

Jesus had a creed. The Jews sang it and still sing it every time they worship:

Shema Y'Israel

Hear, O Israel

Adonai Eloheinu

The Lord Is our God.

Adonai Echad

The Lord is One.

Our creeds are more songs to be sung than theological documents to be signed. We learn of Jesus' creed in the text for today, Mark 12: 28-31.

A scribe, or teacher of the Law, or Torah, came close and heard Jesus debating scripture with religious leaders, and he saw that Jesus was “answering well.” Sometimes we hear Jesus first by *overhearing him*, at a slight difference, then we are drawn to him and come closer. He then asked Jesus the most important question of the faith: “Which commandment is the first of all?”

And Jesus answered with the creed he had sung forever, the *Shema*, the words of Deuteronomy 6: 4-5: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. 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.” Then he added from Leviticus 19:18, “The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. “Then joining them as one, he said, “There is no other commandment greater than this.”

When Jesus was asked, what is your Credo? He went back to the heart of Hebrew faith and recited three things: First, I am one who stands before God in order to hear! As Israel is Israel as it stands before God to hear. We live and grow and thrive as we hear the word and words of God. The second is this. The Lord of all life is MY God, I give my heart to God. The third part was a crucial dimension of the ancient Hebrew faith: The Lord is One. There are not many gods populating heaven and ruling over our lives (and you better choose the right one!) There is one God, and because God is one, the universe is one, truly a UNI- verse, and truth is one, and we, however fragmented we may feel someday, we are one as well.

And then showing that love is at the heart of all the commandments he confirmed: “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.” Then he may have surprised the scribe by not stopping where Deuteronomy stopped but added, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus was improvising his own Credo by adding the love of neighbor and saying that the first and greatest commandment is only the first and the greatest if you put them together as one. The love of God with our whole being and the love of neighbor as ourselves.

There is a certain audacity about saying: *It all boils down to this!* But here it is, the foundation of our faith as followers of Jesus, the love of God and neighbor. I think the heart of the mission of our church and every church is this: The increase of the love of God and neighbor. Everything else pales in comparison with this double love.

The next verse of Deuteronomy goes on to say that this is what we should teach our children , and diligently so :to listen for God , to “cleave” to God as one you love , loving God with all you are and learning to love your neighbor as you love your own dear self, as you *should* love your own dear self.

This is what we are seeking to do every week at church and in our homes, teaching the love of God and neighbor and growing in these loves . This is what we are about this season called Lent, learning at a deeper level the great love of Jesus. John’s gospel says of him, “Loving us, he loved us to the end.” This is what we see as we walk with Jesus this season toward the Cross and the miraculous dawn of Easter.

There is a hymn that captures this for me:

O the deep, deep love of Jesus
 Vast, unmeasured, boundless free!
 Rolling as a mighty ocean
 In its fullness over me,
 Underneath me, all around me,
 Is the current of Thy love;
 Leading onward, leading homeward

To thy glorious rest above.

(S. Trevor Francis)

It was set to music with this great Welsh tune (TON-Y-BOTEL). You can almost feel the waves.....

Go into this season in the great, great love of Jesus.