

Sermon † October 31, 2021

Mark 12:28-34

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There's the story about a man who climbs, at great peril to life and limb, to an eagle perch high in the mountains to get the wisdom from a robed holy man sitting in front of his cave. When the wise one has spoken, the seeker replies in disappointment, "*Heck, you haven't said a single thing I didn't know already. Everything you said is written in some book I've got on a shelf in my living room.*"

The old man answers, "*Yes, I know, But some people like to hear it from an elevated situation.*"

Our story from Mark for this day isn't all that much different from this story. Jesus didn't tell the inquisitive lawyer anything he didn't already know. He wanted to know which commandment was first of all and Jesus repeats the words of the *shema*, the old and familiar commandment from Deuteronomy .

It was a memory verse for every boy who went through Jewish catechism sitting at the feet of the local rabbi. But when Jesus said it, it became an elevated truth. More importantly Jesus adds one phrase to this great commandment . . . a phrase which gives it a whole new dimension.

Deuteronomy 6:4

*"The Lord is our God, one Lord, and you must love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and soul and strength."*

Mark 12

*"The Lord our God is the only Lord, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul; **with all your mind**, and with all your strength."* Jesus added: ". . . **with all your mind** . . ."

Whenever we talk about "*being religious*" or expressing our faith, we tend to talk on an emotional level. And it is very true, part of our religious experience is about emotions and feelings, but we shouldn't forget about loving God with our minds.

I am kind of offended by the notion of some preachers who say that religion is all emotion and that it's not something you think about *only* feel. These are the same people who worry about getting so smart that they'll lose their faith.

Our faith should be a balance of emotion and intellect. Jesus obviously felt that it is important for us to use our minds. What does it mean to love God with the mind? How do you do that? This morning we'll consider a few ways of loving God with the mind.

To love God with the mind, means to keep the mind undivided in its loyalties. Remember Jesus talked about the impossibility of serving two masters. You cannot enter a gate and then walk in two directions at the same time. St. Paul went so far as to suggest that the Christian should not even be concerned with civil pursuits.

The mind that is divided in its loyalties is not the mind that truly loves God. Now keeping our mind undivided in its loyalty to God does not mean that we cannot explore. We are, by nature, curious and we like to look around. But in our exploration, we should remember our origin and the grounds of our safety.

Spelunkers (cave explorers) tie a rope to something outside the cave so they can always find their way out. A mind that would travel many paths of knowledge will find safety in being “tied”—grounded to God.

To love God with the mind is to keep the mind undivided in its loyalties. To love God with the mind means also to keep the mind forever open.

So often we get so comfortable and set in our ways that we become closed minded. We can think of no other way to do it—except our way. To love God with the mind means to keep an open mind.

Figuratively, the Son of God walked about with a glowing lantern in each hand trying to illuminate the darkened minds of his day. The Sadducees could not see because they were too concerned with their temple practices. The Pharisees could not see because of their preoccupation with their own theological points of view. The Romans could not see because of their concern with the empire.

Only the common people were teachable.

The only persons whom Jesus could not help were those who refused to be helped. There is hope for the ignorant mind as long as it is open and teachable. There is no hope for the closed mind.

Petrified by fear or maybe prejudice, there are also those who purposely cover their lamps . . . to keep the light of knowledge from breaking through.

To love God with the mind means to keep the mind constantly engaged in a search for the truth. Intellectual growth is essential for integrity in faith. Intellectual growth is essential for stability in a crisis. There is grave danger when, in a person's development, there has been no room given to authentic questions, no credibility given to doubt.

Scripture must be related to life and not only experienced as an emotion. Intellectual growth is essential for responsible witness and service.

Would you go to a physician who had decided to use only those skills learned during the first year of medical school? Would you trust your car to a mechanic whose knowledge is limited

only to older cars? Would you employ a lawyer whose approach to every case is limited to the level of feelings alone?

To love God with the mind is to keep the mind engaged in the acquisition of knowledge and a fuller understanding of the truth. To love God with the mind means to keep the mind free from inhibiting impurities.

Practice mental hygiene. There is certainly a lot of garbage flowing into our minds these days. Look at what's on T.V. or the internet . . . not to mention video games.

When it comes to the news, we need to be informed . . . not necessarily bombarded. We need to monitor what our children/grandchildren are watching on TV or listening to on podcasts.

Just like the opening story about the guy on the mountaintop, I haven't told you anything you didn't already know. But we sometimes need to be reminded.

Our faith needs to be more than simple emotional responses. It's not all teary eyes and sobbing hearts. Our faith should be a balance of emotions and intelligence.

God has given us all these gifts and we should use them all to their fullest.

*“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is the only Lord;  
love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
with all your mind,  
and with all your strength.”*