

“#361”  
October 25, 2020

Matthew 22:34-??

Events that happen in our lives, create the person we have come to be. Every event shapes us, in some way; it could be a major or minor event; we just don't know which will impact us the most.

Which of these events do you think would impact a person's life most:

- being baptized in the manse of the church,
- joining the church after attending two (2) sets of confirmation classes
- going to a high school dance OR
- going to the 361<sup>st</sup> crusade in 1988.

Which do you think would impact a person's life most?

Which event in the bible had the greatest impact upon the Jewish people? I think we all might have an opinion but I thought I'd ask my OT professor. Pat answered my question in part by writing, "...the most important 'event' was God's deliverance of the escaping slaves at the Reed Sea and the linked revelation of God at Mt. Sinai that established God's covenant and Torah (instruction/law)...". I think I have to agree with her.

Do you not agree, that God, delivering God's people, liberating them from their one-time friends, who turned into oppressors, of greater significance than the dietary laws or even some fun and thoughtful and absolutely apt proverb?

Now to be fair and equal and as a follower of Jesus, I guess we should ask a similar question of us. What event had the most impact on us? I think the central Christian teaching all revolves around God raising Jesus from the dead, all other events in the New Testament, pale in comparison, to Christ being resurrected.

Now to get to today's scripture reading.

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus a question. On the surface, it looks like a proper question - appropriate and respectful enough. But we know that the Pharisees don't just ask Jesus questions, because they are not interested in his views. They are more interested in trying to trip him up - they wanted to make him look bad in the eyes of his sister and brother Jews. Or maybe even better, to catch him saying something they could use against him to tick off Rome, because only Rome could officially do Jesus in. When we look at the reading from Matthew, we have to pay attention to how Matthew sets up the scene. Matthew clearly indicates that the Pharisee who asked the question was a lawyer, and it's no coincidence, that he wanted to test Jesus.

As with all Pharisees, this lawyer's mind was made up; all laws were of equal importance and had to be followed exactly. How could anyone say that one law was more important than another? How could anyone even dare to imply that some laws were less important than others?

In Peter Schaffer's compelling psychological drama *Amadeus*, there are a few comic scenes, and one of them is when the Austrian Emperor Joseph II asks Mozart to adjust one of his operatic compositions. The young Mozart is hurt and stunned, and he demands an explanation from his majesty who replied, "There were too many notes." Wolfgang's temper flared, and he insisted that there were just as many notes as were needed - no more and no less.

The Pharisees felt exactly the same way about the laws, all 613 of them, in their tradition. These laws had evolved from the original 10 to well over 600 so that the people could demonstrate proper obedience to God and to ensure fairness person-to-person - no more and no less. Thus, if Jesus dared to summarize or prioritize, he would offend more of his sister and brother Jews than he already had, and nothing would have pleased and delighted the Pharisees more!

The lawyer, the specialist in the laws of the Jewish people, asks Jesus to think quickly through the hundreds of laws their people had put into place and name the one more important than all the others.

Jesus was up for the challenge, and he gave an answer that was difficult to refute. Now sometimes a question is asked, and the asker already has their mind made up what the correct answer is; kinda like during a children's story when I've asked a question and the answer I got, wasn't what I was anticipating. It totally flustered me. So, when we ask questions just to get confirmation of what we already believe, then what may sound like a question or read like a question, really is not question at all. The lawyer's question is not a question.

The Jewish people being delivered from Egyptian slavery has affected them, Christ being resurrected has affected the Christians of the world and Billy Graham's 361<sup>st</sup> crusade affected Calum MacLeod, to the extent that his life began to change 10 years after the event.

In answering the lawyer's question, Jesus was able to distill 600 plus laws into a simple response. I could be picky and say that Jesus didn't answer the question exactly; but what he did offer was in essence the spirit of the laws when he said, if you want to ultimately live out the spirit of the law and what it demands of us; love God with your whole self, and love your neighbour in the same way that you love yourself.

When Jesus answered the Pharisee's question, he said nothing about duty or responsibility; nor did he point to any threats of punishment for those who chose not to keep the law the way he proposed. Keeping the law properly, as he saw it, was rooted in love. Three kinds of love are mentioned here: love for God, love for neighbor, love for self. Love for God and love for neighbor may not be possible unless one loves oneself. Jesus is laying it out: love is the key. One may keep all the rules and regulations of the ancient law code and still miss the boat in terms of honoring and serving God.

By this answer, the Pharisees were insulted and assaulted! They kept the laws to the tee, every single day of their lives - whether they liked it or not! And Jesus is saying that if one is keeping the law out of fear of an angry God or if one is keeping the law to earn appeasement points with God, she or he isn't keeping the spirit of the law at all. In the end, it's the spirit of the law that counts. Jesus, in his teachings, made that clear over and over again.

The kind of love that Jesus speaks about here isn't the butterflies-in-the-stomach kind of love, one feels when you are 17. It's an action-based kind of love; it's doing-the-right-thing kind of love. Yet, chances are we can't do what should be done in relationship to God and others unless we feel something other than responsibility and/or fear of divine retaliation if we refuse. The end result is important, but motivation is also an essential part of the equation. Why we do something is just as important as the final outcome.