

Trinity 18

October 10 – 11, 2009

Matthew 22:34-46

“A Life in God and Neighbor”

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text for today is from the Gospel lesson, particularly these words, **You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**

Being a Lutheran, I am always fascinated by how people understand the Law. Government, home, work, school, just about every aspect of our lives have laws associated with them. You don't even have to be very old to realize that the Law of Gravity kind of covers us all. What goes up, must come down.

Yet as I observe nature, society and people, one common thread kind of runs through all of these different groups and how they view laws and the Law. People, whether deliberately or not, will always try to figure out ways to make the Law serve them. You figure out how to work your company's vacation day rules to maximize your time in the sun. You figure out how to work your parents rules about what chores you are supposed to do and don't say exactly *when* you are supposed to do them. Taxes. Lawsuits. Pre-nuptial agreements. All the way down to whose turn is it to take out the garbage, at every turn, we seek to use the law to our advantage, and for our own purposes.

That is exactly what is behind this lawyer's question to Jesus: *What is the great commandment?* We could rephrase the lawyer's question this way: *Out of all of God's law, what is really the most important? What is the least that I have to do in order to get into heaven?* The Pharisees were can-do people. They were going to get done whatever needed to get done in order to get into heaven. So to them, the Law is very important, because it is all about requirements and contracts and expectations and what really needs to happen to be right with God.

This is what you do as well. We all do it. We look at the Law as an obstacle to be overcome, so that we can get what we really want. If that means keeping the least number of them in order to “**pass,**” then that’s what we’ll do. We do this at home all the time. *How much work around the house do I need to do in order to get my wife off my back? How much shopping can I do without making my husband angry with me? How many buttons can I push on my parents without setting them over the edge?* You do these things. Don’t deny it.

What Jesus does by His answer is demonstrate that he knows what this lawyer is trying to do. Jesus answers in the words of Deuteronomy:

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

These are words that you and I have probably heard before. But notice what they say. What they say is that the summary of the Law is that it is not about you. Your life is to be lived in God and in your neighbor. That’s it. The Law is not about your needs and desires at all. And every time you use the Law to gain advantage for yourself, you draw yourself away from God and His Word and have fallen into the snare of the devil.

This is serious business, for it shows us how far removed from God’s way of doing things we really are. We often live in a delusional world, where we believe that we are basically good, basically right with God, and that our sin is more or less a little backsliding, or just not quite doing as well as we ought. But that is not what the Scriptures teach, and that is certainly not what Jesus taught or preached. What Jesus taught and preached is that either you keep the Law completely by living your life in God and in service to your neighbor, or you are living your life for yourself.

But perhaps we should ask ourselves the question: *Why should I love God with my everything and my neighbor as myself? Why indeed?* The reason is simple. You love God with your everything because He has given everything to you. Everything you have and own is His. Everything you are, from your personality to your abilities to your family and everything in between. It is all His. And He gives it all to you. Your life is not dependent upon you and what you do. If that were the case, you would mess it up all the time. Your life is dependent completely on God, whether you realize it or not.

It is for that reason we can love God with our hearts, souls and minds. It is also for that reason that God commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves. *Why?* Because you have nothing to lose, since nothing is yours in the first place. You can give yourself in service to your neighbor, because God has given everything to you. Whether we're talking about money or time or talents, it matters not. When you give of yourself, God is at work using you for His great purposes of taking care of the world.

But this is precisely what you cannot do. You cannot give of yourself like that, because you are blinded by your own pride and selfishness. Jesus, of course, knows this, and so he asks the lawyer the second question about the Christ. Whose Son is He, Jesus asks. They answer rightly, *the Son of David*. Jesus then says:

He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?"

What Jesus is getting at here is this. There is no contradiction between service and Lordship. Jesus, who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords Himself, serves the world by shedding His blood on the cross for you. His is the Name above every Name, and yet He is the lowest servant of all.

There is great hope and comfort in this for sinners like you and I, and a renewed perspective on how we view the world. The everyday tasks of your life are sanctified and made holy by the blood of God's Son. Every aspect of your life is connected to the God who became the servant of all. Martin Luther put it this way:

We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor.

This is your life in Christ, dear friends. God has redeemed you by His blood to be His people, His servants in the world. That life of service, though, is not one of payment, where you try and work off a debt. It is a life that you live in freedom, because Christ Himself has done it all for you. Believe it for Jesus' sake. Amen.