

"The Great Commandment" - Mark 12:28-34 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

What "laws" do you live by? If you stop and think about it we live by many and they are quite different. As I have talked with people about it over the last few weeks, we have listed a few: Murphy's Law - "If anything can go wrong, it will." That is a pessimistic law, so I added an optimistic one I call Childs' Corollary - "If anything can go right, with God's help, it just might." There is also a Law of the Jungle - "kill or be killed." There are also the Laws of Physics postulated by Isaac Newton, you may recall the Law of Gravity - "What goes up must come down!" There are also Laws of Thermodynamics; Laws of Economics by Adam Smith, etc. And then of course there are federal, state, and local laws and there are even church laws (the Book of Discipline for United Methodists.) Another law you may know and live by is called The Golden Rule - *Therefore, you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you;* (Matthew 7:12a). Remember that one this week when children come by "Trick or Treating."

The scripture today begins with a "legal expert" asking Jesus for a legal opinion. I would use the term "Biblical scholar" to describe this person. But given the question raised about the most important commandment, this person may have been a specialist whose specialty was the law which is found in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible which we call the Old Testament (OT). The OT has four types of literature: Law, Prophets, Wisdom and History. This expert does not ask about which psalm is the best or which king in the northern kingdom was the most noble or which was Jesus' favorite prophet. The expert was asking Jesus, what laws do you live by, or what laws should we live by? Laws are different from place to place or even from person to person. One of the earliest sets of written laws is the Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian law code established in 1772 BC. It was based on just restitution, and we may recall a line from it that called for equal punishment of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." As professing Christians, we live by a "higher" law. Jesus calls us to live by a Law of Love. In what ways might the way we live and obey this law of love become a witness and a testimony to non-believers? Love your neighbor as you love yourself. To do that you must remember to love yourself and only then can you truly love others that way! Sometimes we are harder on ourselves than we are on others. Lighten up! Love yourself! Always remember, God loves you. So, love yourself with God's love, and then go share that abundant love with others. In a world so filled with Random Acts of Violence, do some **Random Acts of Love** for others today.

Where do you feel close to God's kingdom? For some there are places, like at the cemetery, that cause a feeling of being close to God and to those "Saints" who have gone before us. (BTW next Sunday is All Saints' Sunday when we will recall and remember those who have died this past year.) But you may have had a mountain top experience out in nature somewhere, or on a spiritual retreat, or during a special worship service. In Jesus' eyes, during this holy conversation, the legal expert had transcended from the "letter of the law" to the "spirit of the law" and therefore was deemed not far from God's kingdom! That is my hope with worship, small groups or Bible studies that a moment will come when a light goes on and people have that new insight and faith becomes alive.

Here it is in the midst of a holy conversation and an affirmation of what is ultimately important! The legal expert affirmed that Jesus was right, this law of love “*is much more important than all kinds of entirely burned offerings and sacrifices.*” (Mark 12:32) This is important and I think pivotal. For a thousand years, people had come to the Temple to offer sacrifices to God. Sometimes these were grains or crops but often animals. The prophet Micah had taught this, eight hundred years before. *With what should I approach the LORD and bow down before God on high? Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings, with year-old calves? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with many torrents of oil? Should I give my oldest child for my crime; the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit? He has told you, human one, what is good and what the LORD requires from you: to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.* (Micah 6.6-8)

This week live God’s law of love. Find ways to love God each day. Find people with whom you might share God’s love each day. And remember to do something to love yourself each day! Alleluia and Amen.

What’s in This Great Commandment (Mark 12)

Jeffrey B. Childs 10/27/21

What's in this great commandment,
That Christ gives you and me?
It is not one commandment,
We find that there are three.

The first one is to love the Lord,
And go to any length.
God is thus to be adored,
With heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Love your neighbor is number two,
And neighbor includes them all.
Act of mercy we're to do,
With all our wherewithal.

Number three you must recall,
For it's important too.
After loving God and all,
Remember to love you.