

Shiloh United Methodist Church

The Most Important Commandment of All

Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Rev. Tyler Amundson February 3, 2019
Mark 12:28-31

Spoken Word – Beginning of Service

Today we conclude a worship journey we have been on about “Finding Joy in Real Life.” We have been exploring 5 principles take from scriptures, principles about what it means to live the Christian life. More importantly the core principles that lead us to the true joy and life that is “really life” that Jesus shares in the gospels. As I have shared each week I hope you have found some new information, a piece of wisdom, or an understanding that helped you deepen your practice of faith. As your Pastor I have learned a lot by exploring these scriptures and understandings.

Our lesson today is on the Greatest Commandment.

Today as we enter worship together, as we begin this weekly journey we partake in together, I want to invite you to take a deep breathe. Slow the pace of your life, and remember who you are. You are a beautiful child of God, capable of love, justice, kindness, forgiveness and generosity, you a beloved, you are human, and you are called to seek God each day in your life. Trust as we are in worship today that you are here to rekindle your fire, to fill your cup, that God’s Holy Spirit might spill out through us in the coming week. I invite us to be present as we explore God’s love today.

Message –

Firemaker Story¹

Second Service – Read Scripture Here

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 Common English Bible (CEB)

⁴ Israel, listen! Our God is the Lord! Only the Lord!

⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength.

Mark 12:28-31 Common English Bible (CEB)

²⁸ One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”

²⁹ Jesus replied, “The most important one is *Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, ³⁰ and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength.* ³¹ The second is this, *You will love your neighbor as yourself.* No other commandment is greater than these.”

Over the last 4 weeks we have been learning the practices that lead to the deep Joy Jesus shared.

Recap – (Slide)

1. Love others as you seek to love yourself.

We talked about our need to follow the golden rule, to be in relationship with others and support them and also to love our whole person in order to be open to practicing the golden rule.

2. Do justice and practice loving-kindness.

We learned about our call to serve the people often disadvantaged by society and to do it through loving relationship with all people.

3. Asking for, extending forgiveness.

We learned that forgiving others and ourselves is a key to life and to relieving the struggles in life, that carrying those unforgiven parts of life

¹ *The Firemaker.* Silf, Margaret, Collected By. *one hundred Wisdom Stories from around the world*, The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, 2003.

around can result in a lot of pain and un-needed weight on our shoulders.

4. Demonstrate generosity to others.

Last week we took some time to remember that we are called to generously share what God has offered to us, and to remember that Jesus will work with us to help us understand what acts of generosity can clear our path to connecting with God.

Those 4 distilled down to the second great commandment we heard in the gospel of Mark today. They teach us how we love our neighbor as our self, how we do unto others as we would have them do to us. If we seek to live these things we will find joy in our lives, we will find our life filling with abundant life.

Today our 5th and final Sunday focuses on the first part of the Mark scripture we hear today, something that is echoed from the passage in Deuteronomy.

Our focus today is called the Shemah in the Jewish tradition.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 Common English Bible (CEB)

⁴ Israel, listen! Our God is the Lord! Only the Lord!

⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength.

Deuteronomy is where Moses is summarizing the law and this is the reminder about what is important. We know it is important because if you read certain translations of the Bible you will see Lord here written in all capitals. When you see all caps for “lord” in an English translation it is for a specific name for God. The way you have heard this name is most likely Yahweh, translated from the Hebrew in which it has no vowels, it is closer to YHWH, it sounds like a breath. The name itself is meant to leave us knowing that God is our very breath, God is the great “I Am,” all is a part of God and God is in all. The source of life itself, throughout time, space, dimensions and universes.

In Jewish tradition they actually take the Shemah, this scripture about loving God, and place inside a small tube shaped object they nail to the doorframes of the exits to their homes. (Picture)² It is an object touched as one leaves the home and “Hear Oh Israel, God is the only God, love the Lord you God with all your being and strength is said.” These are the words faithful Jews hope to say with their dying breath.

It is no wonder then that Jesus, when asked the greatest commandment offers the Shemah. He knew it well, and it would have been the greatest commandment for all Jews, and then he offers the second greatest commandment too, being clear the first is meaningless unless you practice the second of loving your neighbor as yourself.

It is worth noting that the word used in the Deuteronomy passage for love is, “Ahev.” It refers to a intimate, relational love, the love between family, and love shown to a child.

One of the biggest fights in the Christian tradition today is whether our faith is about a relational love with God, a relationship with Jesus. Or the word for love Jesus uses in the New Testament versions of the Shemah, Agape, or unending and deep love that reconciles things to itself through caring for others deeply. Agape love rings more true to the people who seek justice, and love kindness.

Some would say, “Well Jesus said “Agape” so that is how we should live.” To them I would say that if we take scripture as a whole and we trust God to be pointing us the way through scripture that is both loves.

²https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Freformjudaism.org%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fstyles%2Farticle_inline_image%2Fpublic%2Fmezuzah1.jpg%3Fitok%3DKEEiqLmT&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Freformjudaism.org%2Fpractice%2Flifecycle-and-rituals%2Fwhat-mezuzah-why-and-how-do-we-use-it&docid=mCrTm0SCKJ0eoM&tbnid=OYcjQR9qGy8fgM%3A&vet=10ahUKEwj2gzXn53gAhWHwVQKHFsnCLIQMwibAigfMB8..i&w=300&h=348&safe=off&client=safari&bih=839&biw=1433&q=mezuzah&ved=0ahUKEwj2g-zXn53gAhWHwVQKHFsnCLIQMwibAigfMB8&iact=mrc&uact=8

We need a relationship with our parent God, one who loves us and holds near. We also need to live out our love like Jesus, and those two loves are what our God calls us to in scripture for how to live as Christian people.

Part of this series has also been to offer how to practice the 5 habits we have shared. The practice of these ways of love I find is best supported through regular worship. This thing we do Sunday morning is a form of worship.

Worship literally means reverence and adoration shown to something. In our case we assume that this worship is of God. The loving and living God pointed to by our Jewish brother, our Christ, and who we see as founder our faith, Jesus.

Defining worship seems to be the easy task in this current generation. I found all of that definition within 2 minutes with access to my computer's dictionary and a google search. The challenge arises in understanding worship when I ask myself, "Why?" Why do we worship?" The traditional answer I have heard is, "To show our obedience to God." I find myself struggling with this answer. I struggle because I can't understand why God needs me to worship him or to demonstrate my obedience. Obedience is a word that to me demonstrates a subservient and unhealthy relationship. A relationship where one has all the power and wields over another. My analytic brain just does not work with this idea of obedience. Obedience conjures up too many thoughts of violence and abuse.

There are a lot of people in this world for whom making this conclusion about worship is not difficult. In fact as I was reading the news the other day a Time article came up. It stated that researchers in Canada found the more analytic a person the less belief they had in God. The

more intuitive they were the more likely they were to have some kind of sense that God existed.

Now this article isn't surprising or profound. Many analytical thinkers find concepts of God to be strange or silly. I know I have felt and still feel this at times in my faith walk. In fact many of us sitting here will have the feeling that this idea of God is silly from time to time. We were taught well in our school analytic thinking and so we are trained to question everything we do. This is what good critical thinkers and problem solvers do. We question. Thank goodness for this gift too. It allows us to solve problems in our world and to encourage free thinking to grow and change.

However, this analytic thinking is also what makes it hard to be open to that which the combination of our being makes us aware of. It makes it hard to be open to creation, to our brothers and sisters, and to the sense of God's love all round us. The article in Time stated at the end that scientists agree that both the analytic and intuitive is important. That a belief in God has benefits as well as the more analytical thought. The challenge here is how we bring both these aspects to worship.

During my time in Denver I met with a group of young adults. The group was formed on the premise that we had questions about religion, God, and life. What I learned from this group is that many people in our culture struggle with even the idea of church. However, most especially they struggle with worship. Worship is perceived as being a time of monotonous-uni-directional-babbling-supplication to a fictitious being. "How could that be useful to me?" is the question I hear.

The answer to that question is it's not useful to anyone. That kind of worship is something that only seeks to maintain the status-quo and maintain an organization. If that is what worship is then I think we all can agree, we don't want to be a part of that either. Worship has to be

about something more it has to be about being open to the power of the gathered community, the enveloping love of God, and the transformation possible through God's grace. It is not about supplication, not about bowing down. We must redefine it as a time to make ourselves available to the repenting, transformational power of God's love. Worship fire making, not just praising the name of the fire maker.

The great Christian thinkers speaker of Worship as a thin place where we hear the diversity of God's voices. For them, worship does not just happen in a sanctuary or holy place. Instead, we must remember that the thin places are where God's fire, and holy river of life can reach us and warm our hearts and fill them for the task of being vessels of love. For worship to be that we have to embrace diversity and remember things like the reality that a Catholic priest, George Lemaitre, were the ones to postulate items like the big bang theory. So that our analytical friends and intuitive ones can trust how science and religion might coincide. We have to consider diverse music, which has been a challenge as we have tried to meet the needs of modern music.

Worship music explained-

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/worship-songs>

Worship, the music, the prayers, the spoken words, the silence are all to help us light our fire, and allow the river of God to fill our beings through word and sacrament. I invite you to not let worship be just a Sunday thing, on your playing card is initiation to begin a gratitude journal. I encourage you to do that or begin to read scripture daily as a practice of connecting to the source of God each day. If neither of those suggestions work, please ask me for others to help you find the thin places each day.

One last story before we pray about how much this connection to a God that loves us matters:

Leonid Brezhnev was the leader of the USSR from 1964 until his death in 1982. George HW Bush, then the Vice President, was our dignitary to the funeral in 1982. At the end of the funeral George Bush recalls a striking scene. Viktoria Breshnev was standing near the casket for much of the end of the service, motionless, and then when the soldiers moved to place the lid on the casket she leaned over and blocked them. At that moment she made the sign of the cross over his body. George Bush remarked that it was a humbling sight to see the widow of the leader of an atheist state making this symbol of religious hope over her husbands body.

I don't share this story, so we will get mad at atheism. I share this to remind us that the relational love of God is something sought after around the world, that the opportunity to worship needs to be something the state never directs, nor denies. Instead for us to truly love the Lord our God, we have to practice it and then we have to practice spreading the fire of God's love through acts of Agape love in the world. To follow Jesus, to love our God we are called to the Greatest Commandment and the second...the rest is just commentary.

Prayer

Would you pray with me, God help us to follow your great commandments in our lives. Help us to for a relationship with you by going to the places that fill us up, and that make it seem the veil between you and us is thin. God we trust you are with us all the time, but sometimes we forget. Help us to allow our whole being to be immersed in your love, to live out that love and the be greatful for what you offer us through Jesus Christ. Amen