



TOUCH POINT

Sami and the Scribe – Touchpoint for October 30, 2024

Mark 12:28-34 The First Commandment (NRSVUE)

28 One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” 29 Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” 32 Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; 33 and ‘to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” 34 When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live, move, and have our being.

“In our earthly kingdoms, we make laws and then attempt to project those rules to a kingdom of heaven, though we know nothing.”

I’m struggling to fashion this touchpoint without addressing the elephant and the donkey in the room. I am presently staying with some friends who own an African tortoise. Sami, they call him, just went into hibernation. Sami may be slow, but he is so very wise. Do we all sound this silly when we defend our views be able to hibernate. I will not avoid it, but I will join with you in seeing what the gospel of Mark brings us.

Let me begin with the banter between Jesus and the Sadducees prior to our dialogue between the expert in the law and Jesus.

The Sadducees who were questioning Jesus were sticklers for the Law of Moses. They believed only in those laws and didn’t believe in any type of resurrection or immortality. Jesus’s talks were evidently getting under their skin, and they wanted to get under his skin by making his resurrection and eternal life message look silly. They used laws concerning marriage to debunk his heaven talks. This all happened earlier before the expert of the law approached Jesus in our story.

They proposed a scenario where a woman’s husband dies, and as the law demands, his brother marries her and takes up the job of having a family with her. If he dies and there are no children, the next brother marries her. In this case, there are seven brothers, and they keep dying one after another without having children, and then she dies having married seven guys? The question they have is, “Who will be her husband in this resurrected life, you claim.”

I imagine them grinning and elbowing each other with gotcha faces.

First, the purpose of this marriage law presented was 1) to carry on the family name and 2) to keep the wealth and privilege in the family. The Sadducees were aristocratic and wealthy with great privilege.

Do we all sound this silly when we defend our views? I wonder if future societies will roll their eyes at the debates we are having today.

In his response, Jesus makes it very clear that the laws of heaven are not like those on earth. There will not be marriage, divorce, etc. Jesus seems always to relate everything to the kingdom of heaven. The parables were stories about how things would be if God were in charge.

In our earthly kingdoms, we make laws and then attempt to project those rules to a kingdom of heaven, though we know nothing. Jesus points out to them they are basically a bunch of misinformed diphthongs. Kind of how we do with our interpretations of the Bible.

I think there are Sadducees, Pharisees, and Scribes like these who are taking residence in my brain sometimes! Or, as Brennan Manning calls them, Posers, Fakers, and Wannabes.

Why do we become so bound by rules and laws that we lose sight of the reason for the laws and rules? If we can discern the purposes influencing laws, we may re-think the laws. As laws lose their original purpose, they are held onto for tradition or only to benefit an advantaged or disadvantaged demographic.

So, Jesus' traveling liberation band was a threat to how rabbinical laws were being used in the here and now. Jesus spoke of resurrection and eternal living, neither of which fit into the theology of the Sadducees. The Pharisees and Scribes were all about law-keeping and enforcement. The Sadducees were experts in the Law of Moses and were thrown by Jesus' teachings. Jesus was an expert on life, love, and liberty from God. While Jesus respected the law, he knew there were more important things before the laws were created.

Jesus introduced the concepts of life, love, and liberty extending through this present life, and it was disturbing to these guys because it wasn't what they believed and taught. To a person like an expert in the law, Jesus either intrigued them or enraged them. For this one expert who approached Jesus, the liberating good news affirmed the deepest desire of his heart.

I wonder if he was a plant in the crowd. Jesus knew him and asked him to ask this question. It was just too good of a setup!

It's only natural for human beings to project onto heaven what we understand as life here on earth in a utopian way—images of clean streets, parties, dancing, and good vibrations for all! We want to protect these imaginations and claim they've been promised.

But Jesus brings us back to the heaven in the here and now. He is offering a bit of heaven by going back to the very purposes of why we were created. To be the recipient of all of God's love with no expectations. This belonging makes all laws subservient and makes the need for milieu control unnecessary.

When I was a youth leader, we took a busload of teens on a work trip, and my mentor told me we would only have one rule, and it was more of a way of being. Mutual respect. I was astounded. Are you sure they won't take advantage of this freedom? Earl Logan said, "Well, that's when they help us make a rule if it's needed. Why start with an expectation that they are going to violate mutual respect?" To my surprise, it built a relationship with the kids that would be more of an active mutual engagement. The bonding and problem-solving were wonderful.

“Policies will fade away, leaders will die, elections will be history, surely the rage and the excitement will diminish but God's love endures forever.”

Jesus was about guiding his followers into intimate engagement with the sacred. Both vertical with God and horizontally interdependent with others. Jesus was not going to argue with them on their finite terms. He knew their laws were about control.

The expert of the law in this passage, a scribe, asks Jesus what the first law is. In other words, the most essential law. Jesus answers there is one God. However, there are two laws which are essential more than all. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. This does not make the expert's head spin; it resonates with him at the heart level. Probably because he was a student of life before the law and the limitations of the laws. Somebody was finally saying something he thought but never could be put into words.

He says it's even more important than burnt offerings and self-sacrifice. This may have been an expert on the law of Moses, but he was intuitive as well. A common sense intuitive.

[“Loving God and others isn't just a future bumper sticker”](#)

Jesus made it very clear not only to his followers but every denomination and faction that there are only two laws of great importance. Two laws that have been in place since the garden. Long before our laws were given because of hardening hearts. It's to “love the lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.” It starts with love and ends with love.

No wonder this expert of the law said Jesus nailed it. Then the scribe took it even further saying loving God and others isn't just a future bumper sticker, it is an intersection in the center of our lives. Where utter dependence on God and interdependence with others meet centrally on the cross of The Way.

Perhaps these two commandments are like a black light that, in the darkness of confusion, illuminates the scorpions of it all.

Policies will fade away, leaders will die, elections will be history, surely the rage and the excitement will diminish but God's love endures forever. And these two commandments must be the bookends.

Jesus seems to be courting people from every point of view and guiding them toward Loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and loving your neighbor as you love yourself.

Can we apply this commonsense way of living, moving and being into every aspect of our earthly lives? Or have we been caught up in protecting policies and politics without the light of the two commandments? Even to this turbulent election year?

Where I'm staying presently, there is a pet African tortoise. Sami just went into hibernation. Sami must have scheduled this around the American election cycle. I don't blame him!

Is there a sermon title more in the two love commandments or must we be bombarded with “Vote Like Jesus”, “A Worldview of Voting”, “The Bible and the Ballot”. Evangelical Pastors nationwide think they need to make sure you are voting right. IRS laws prevent them from saying specifically how to vote, but that doesn't keep them from putting their thumb on heavens scale.

Regarding this, I turn to respected theologian Walter Bruggeman who wrote a piece on this subject called “Anticipating the Election” in July 2024.

Bruggeman asks a very important question. If we are a Jesus follower which direction did Jesus tilt? It wasn't party, policy, or popularity. There is no question which direction the will of the father was in the purpose and love of Jesus. We all know it. May we not let laws, policies, and bible interpretations confuse or cloud the two greatest commandments. We can, with common sense, ask ourselves not what Jesus would do, but what Jesus did. Christ is not hibernating with Sami the tortoise. Nor should we. YHWH or Baal? Idols and ideologies or the Divine one?

As we seek wisdom, we would do well to place the two big commandments at the forefront. The most important commandments holding light over the darkest of times. Darkness cannot comprehend the light but perhaps we will emerge because of its "steadfast love and faithfulness." By loving God first and our neighbors be a black light to find the scorpions in self-promoting agendas and blind ambitions, both in ourselves and others.

"If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. James 1:5

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

In the Arms of God

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

Refrain: Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear. Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear. For the burden you carry will fade within God's care. Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace.

Refrain

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your souls true rest. Fall in the arms of God.

Refrain

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God.

Refrain

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

Benediction

A Celtic Blessing

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you, the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.

The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.