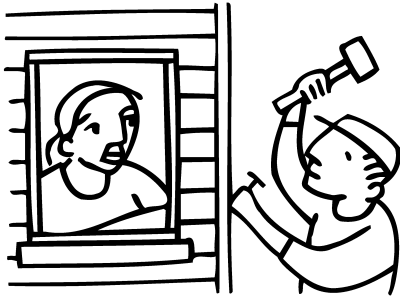


YEAR A - THE YEAR OF MATTHEW

THE HOLY GOSPEL

PENTECOST 19—HARVEST OCTOBER 23, 2011



The Holy Gospel is according to St. Matthew the Twenty-second Chapter.

The Greatest Commandment

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, **35** one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. **36**

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" **37** said to him, "**You shall love the Lord**

your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' **38** This is the greatest and first commandment. **39** And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' **40** On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

The Question about David's Son

41 while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: **42** "**What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?**" They said to him, "The son of David." **43** said to them, "**How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,** **44** '**The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet" '?** **45** **If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"** **46** one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon - October 23, 2011

Year A - The Year of Mark - Pentecost 19

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18, Psalm 1; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."

"All." It is such a little word, only three letters: "all." However, that little word has such a big meaning, "Not some, not a portion, not a little bit, not most of, but all." The little word encompasses everything, everyone, no exceptions, no limits - "All."

We call it the Great Commandment or the Summary of the Law: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' **38** This is the greatest and first commandment. **39** And a second is like it:

'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

At the beginning of most every service, we make the confession that says that "We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves." The words of Jesus in today's Gospel echo in our worship and in our prayers.

Notice the word used for this text is "commandment": an imperative, not a choice. Thou shalt. Commandments are marching orders, requirements. When God commands "All," that is what he means. "All" means with every ounce of our being: our hearts, our minds, our souls.

Martin Luther said that when he was living in the monastery and felt so deeply the weight of his sin before God, and the fear of God's wrath and judgment against him, he could not bear to think of these words by Jesus. How could anybody love God with all his soul, mind, and heart? One day, one of his superiors said to Luther that all he had to do was love God.

What would it mean if we really tried to do this commandment and the "all" it calls us to live? How can we manifest that little word "all" into our real lives? What changes would we have to make? How would we live our lives differently?

Frankly, we fail the test, miserably. We are the lukewarm People.

In the very early days of the early church, there was a man believed to have come from England, whose name was Pelagius; he taught that people could live the law of God perfectly if they wished. If they truly tried, and if they really believed, they could live their entire lives without breaking any of the Ten Commandments. Saint Augustine took issue with this view because humans by their nature break the Ten Commandments. Furthermore, he said that even if one could keep all the commandments, a person could never fully keep the first commandment where we are to have no other gods. This is because humans can never fully love the Lord our God with all our hearts, minds, and souls.

Scripture says, "Where your treasure is, there is your heart." In order to understand what this means, think of it as where your heart goes first and last. When your mind is empty, daydreaming, when you are sitting at a stoplight, standing before the kitchen sink, the last thing before falling asleep, where does your mind go? That is your treasure. It is the thing or things that fill up your heart with worry, concern, joy, and satisfaction. It is your first priority, your interest, the center of your energy and attention. Would love of God and neighbors be on top of that list?

The secret is to want to live out the commandments, no matter how poorly we actually do it. The secret is in our heart's desiring. Do we really desire to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and souls and minds and to love our neighbor as ourselves? Truth be known, many say no. We do not mind loving God or our

neighbor, but forget that little word “all.”

“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” The answer for us may be found in the word “hang.” This word usually is overlooked in the text. “Hang” can mean the way we put up our clothes in the closet, or it can mean what we do with the birdfeeder. However, in this text, the word “hang” is the same one used for “Jesus, whom you slew and hanged upon the cross.” That shifts the entire meaning of the Great Commandment.

The fulfillment of the law and prophets, and loving of God and neighbor is found in Christ as he hung on the cross for all of us. He was there not for a few or select number, but for all humanity. He does what we cannot do.

We gather here today as a rural community to celebrate the harvest. It is the least we can do. It is part of loving God with all our heart, mind, and soul. God asks that we come and give thanks for what he gives to and for us. God only asks that we come and worship. The least we can do is come and offer our confession, prayers, and thanks to the God who not only gives our lives, but also sustains them. We offer our prayers through Christ who hung on the cross for each one of us. He is the God who is part of our hearts, minds, and souls. He is the God who shows us who is our neighbor; and in serving our neighbor, we are serving God.

All, wholly, completely, entirely, and every, this is how we are to love God. It is how God loves us for in this world of hardships and imperfections, Christ went to hang on the cross for us so that we might have life in death, forgiveness rather than sin, and a kingdom born of Christ's victory over sin and death. In the face of this we bring before God a celebration of the harvest not just of the fields, but of our hearts, lives, and minds, which have been freed and forgiven by Christ as he hung on the cross and rose from the grave. Amen.