

**One God, One Love**  
**Mark 12:28 - 34**  
**November 1, 2009**

During the last few weeks we have been looking at Jesus' final travels with his disciples. The disciples have debated amongst themselves not only about who is the greatest amongst them, but also concerning who will have the pleasure of sitting to the left and to the right of the Messiah in the Kingdom that is to come. Last Sunday, reminding us once again about the importance to serve others, regardless of our current state of awareness, we met up with Jesus as he was leaving the city of Jericho, on his way to the city of Jerusalem. The blind beggar, Bartimaeus, devoid of the need to be seen, seeks to see again, not so that he may return to the life he knew before his blindness, but so that he may look forward to a life serving others, to be a disciple of the one true Christ.

We are aware through our recent studies that many are making their way from all over the region to the capital city of Israel to celebrate the Passover and so it is not unusual for Jesus to encounter large crowds of people during these last days of his public ministry. Intermixed within these crowds Jesus also encounters the enemy, as characterized by the religious leaders of the time who are attempting to discredit Jesus through public debate. We recall one such example of this in Mark 10 when the Pharisees asked "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Jesus responds to their inquiry by adamantly instructing them that man has no right to attempt to tear apart what God has joined together. Jesus' words were not only compelling because of his response to Mosaic Law, but because his words spoke to a deeper meaning of relationship and the authority to which we submit ourselves in our relationship with our God through Christ. These increasing accounts of questioning and debate seem almost to serve as a prediction of the events that are to come once Jesus and his followers have spent a few days in the capital city of Jerusalem.

In our scripture reading this morning, we read of a scribe who has begun to question Jesus on the details of Mosaic Law. There were 613 laws designated under the law; 365

were negative commandments and 248 were positive in nature. Describes in terms of "heavy" and "light" it is important to note that while many of the laws were derived from scripture, many were part of oral tradition; tradition that had led to the development of these extra laws through a response to interpret the Mosaic Law. Jesus does not respond with one of the Ten Commandments we have grown to be so passionate about in American Christianity today, but rather gives a response that is a combination of the *Shema*, a well known prayer that comes from the Deuteronomy 6:4-5 which reads, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" and a passage of scripture found in Leviticus 19:18 which reads, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself." And so with these two recitations, Jesus manages to sum up 613 commands.

It is not unlikely that the scribe find some comfort and understanding in the Jesus' response. In fact, Jesus commends and encourages him as one who is, "not far from the kingdom." With a basic understanding of such a simple construct, *love*, the scribe has found himself in favor with Christ and so we too can learn something about obeying God's law through our understanding of these two commands. Recall that Jesus said, "I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law" and so we begin to see that Jesus is speaking of bringing life, love and relationship back to a lost and dying world.

In answering the scribe's question, Jesus quoted from the *Shema*, probably the most important prayer recited by observant Jews. In summarizing all the commandments of Scripture and tradition by way of the *Shema*, Jesus is simply following the teaching of his Word and the intent of the Mosaic Law. Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord," recited in the *Shema*, is regarded as a confession of belief in One God, that is, we are reminded here first and foremost that there is only the one true God. Immediately following these words, verse 5 instructs us to "Love the Lord [our] God with all

[our] heart, with all [our] soul and with all [our] strength.” I can’t help but hear the words, “One God, One Love” ring out from these words from Deuteronomy. All of Mosaic Law is summarized here by the command to love God and others.

So what do we mean by love? I want you to know this morning that I love each and every one of you here today. But the love I have for you is more than just a love we have grown to know cheaply in our world today. In the musical, *Moulin Rouge*, the opening scene presents us with our main character, who ironically is named Christian, typing away frantically at his typewriter in an attempt to put into words a love that he has come to know; to verbalize on paper the important lessons of life. “The greatest thing you’ll ever learn,” he writes, “is to love and to be loved in return.”

Ladies and gentleman I must declare to you today that life and relationship is much more than that. It is not to love in the way we as a culture and community have come to know through warm fuzzies defined by a feeling we have in the pit of our stomach whenever that special someone in our life enters into the room and it is certainly not about being loved in return, at least not in the sense of defining our self worth by our relationships with others. Our concept of self cannot and should not be defined by how others view us, by our relationship status or by how a nation defines legally recognized partnerships and marriages.

The word most often used in the New Testament for God’s love is word *agape*, which means a love that expresses itself in practical and sacrificial service for others, regardless of their deserving. Agape love is then a lot like grace, the grace given to you and I by an all powerful, all caring God.

In John 4:8 we read that God is love. As Paul Scherer says, it is easy to confuse this statement with a definition of God. But we can say a lot more about God than that he is love. God is holy. God is almighty. God is wisdom. So, love does not adequately define God, rather God in his infinite ability to provide us with all that we are undeserving to

receive, defines love for us. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son . . ." is another verse that describes the costly love of God. It is a love that begins with and must come from God. (Scherer)

God so loved that he gave and His love is given to us regardless of our interest in him our response to him. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that all are *saved* regardless of interest or response, only that God gives His love to us regardless of our interest and response. Paul in his letter to the Romans says God demonstrated love for us when we were powerless, ungodly and sinful. In fact, he says God saved us while we were yet sinners and thus enemies of God. Jesus response is often referred to as the Great Commandment; a commandment that calls us to love God with the same kind of love that God has shown us and to in turn express that love to others with the same kind of costly love. "One God, One Love" takes us a long way from the sentimental notions of love as a mutual exchange of feelings and admiration. Loving God is about action and our love for God gets expressed in ways that honor God and honor those who are made in God's image.

Loving is call from God; a call to serve – a call to action. It is also a call to awareness. First to become a aware of those who we are called to serve and second and equally important, an awareness to love those we are led to in a way that is meaningful to them. As Followers of God, it is important to love others in ways that are clear to them. They need to know that our response to serve is indeed a response to love and not a response to charity, pity or a need to satisfy our own desires to be seen. Simply stated, if the person you are called to serve is not aware of the love that supports that service, then your love cannot have the fully intended effect.

It is easy for us to understand this in terms of romantic love. We send text messages to our partners in the middle of the day, buy them small gifts when they least expect, prepare their favorite meal at the end of a hard day and sacrifice our time to attend to their needs. These same sorts of responses extend to our community of faith, as well.

In order to show love to not only the people of this community of faith, but to those within our surrounding community, we must be willing to do so in tangible ways. James wrote about his as he criticized the Christians who told the hungry and cold to “Go, be warmed and well-fed” without lifting a finger to give them something to eat or something to wear. Love *must* express itself in ways that are understandable.

So as we move into the busy season of the Holidays that are fast approaching us today; seasons that for many of us will be filled with food, family, fellowship and giving, but for some will be void of many of these things we have grown to expect and in some cases even take for granted, let’s be reminded of the Great Command that Jesus has given us – Love God with all your heart, soul and strength and to love others as you would yourself (or your own). Our call to action does not have to be a grand gesture of sacrifice; it can be small and humble. It isn’t the size of the gesture, but rather the effectiveness of the gesture to meet a need.

When it comes to loving others, Jean Varnier, founder of a faith based ministry for people with intellectual disabilities, says that love must – reveal value in the other person, offer understanding, aid in communication, celebrate the life of the other person, provide people with a sense of empowerment, offer an opportunity to part of a community and to assist in forgiving and forgiveness. Love is not always about creating lifelong earthly relationships or about becoming solely responsible for the everyday well being of those around us. It is about meeting a need, fostering self worth and being Jesus to a lost and dying world. Love means I see value in you and tell you I do; I listen to you enough to understand what you are saying; I communicate with you and receive communication from you; I celebrate the wonder that is your life, no matter the difficulty of its present circumstance; I empower you to act on your own and to take responsibility for living up to your potential; I move with a community that includes you and others who are all seeking

to love in the ways that God has shown us love; and, I forgive you and ask that you forgive me. (Vanier)

Could we add one more component to Vanier's list, an eighth characteristic of love? Let's add sacrifice. This is, in fact, the kind of love God has shown us, "God showed great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." (Romans 5:8) Recall that earlier I placed emphasis on the distinction between God loving us and our salvation. That is, God does not save us regardless of our interest or response, but rather God gives His love to us regardless of our interest and response. God loves each and every one here today. It doesn't matter where you've come from, who you are or what you've done.

Michael and I attended the Judgment house at Tom's Creek Baptist Thursday night. In all their effort to bring the love of God to those who attended, it was hard to see that they genuinely believed in what they were saying. Our guide repeatedly reminded us that it doesn't matter how good of a life we lead or how much we do to serve of families and others, but it is about accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. Our guide summarized this up about half way through the event when she said something to the affect of, "it doesn't matter what you've done in this life, instead it is about accepting Jesus as Savior." At that moment I had such an amazing realization; one that I sadly believe that many overlook. You see, our guide was correct on a much deeper level that I think she even believed. You see, it doesn't matter what you've done in this life; not only concerning the good deeds in life but also concerning the mistakes we may have made.

I've made a lot of mistakes in my life and I am sure there are others here, who have made quite a few themselves, but God loves me and God loves you. Our community of faith decrees that all people shall have equality of access and opportunity which is free from discrimination on grounds of gender, sexual orientation, race, age, physical challenge, health status, gender identification, nationality or economic status not based on personal belief and ethics, but because this is how God has loved and does love us.

Reach out to God today and accept God's gift of Love, the gift of eternal salvation. If you are here today and have never known God's love for you, know that today can be that day. If you are here today and desire to renew your relationship with your Creator, know that today can be that day, as well.

Let us pray.

Amen.