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May 14th 2023

Scripture: Mark 12: 29-31

Sermon: God's Love and Self Love

Prayer....

Introduction:

When I was seventeen my parents bought me a \$50 used guitar and I began learning to play guitar from my friend Drew. Drew and I were in the high school choir together and when he taught me guitar, he also invited me to sing with him for the twice a year choir assemblies. For example, Drew and I sang Sound of Silence by Simon and Garfunkel. He was Simon. I was Garfunkel. I owe a lot to Drew and those are great memories.

In college, I decided to begin writing my own music and the first song I wrote was based on our Scripture passage. The chorus of the song went like this:

Love the Lord with all your heart

Love the Lord with your soul

Love the Lord with you mind and your strength and

Love your neighbor as yourself

When Jesus was asked by a scribe, “Which commandment is the first of all? Jesus answered, “The first is , “Hear O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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.’

The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Why did Jesus share these two commandments as the greatest of all?

Where did he learn these Scriptures?

Remember Jesus is Jewish and grew up learning the Shema, which is part of a prayer that Jews are taught to say in the morning and evening.

The entire Shema is found in Deuteronomy 6: 4-9. It reads. “Hear O’Israel: The Lord is Our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Jesus grew up in a house that had the Shema literally on the doorpost of his house. He grew up reciting this commandment in the morning and the evening as part of his daily prayers. He grew up learning to revere God and to worship God alone and to love God. The Jewish people understood that healthy homes would encourage children to love God and to pray to God. This is such a beautiful example of the spiritual practices of God loving families and communities.

The second commandment about loving your neighbor as yourself comes from Leviticus in the Old Testament. Leviticus 19: 18 says, “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” Again, the Jewish wisdom teaches hear the importance of community and showing love to one’s neighbor, even as one cares for one’s self.”

As we remember Mother’s Day this morning, may we be reminded by our call to show love to God and our neighbor within our homes and within our broader communities.

When Jesus talks about the greatest commandments, he is also awakening us to what is central in life.

1. The first thing that is central is loving God with our whole being.

This is an embodied form of love. Soul in the Hebrew is nephesh and actually means throat, including our breath. We are to love God with every breath we breathe, with our whole being, including the strength of our bodies. Loving God is full

embodiment, loving God with our bodies, including our minds, our strength, and our breath. To help us understand the word soul in the Hebrew more, I am going to show a 4 minute video clip from the Bible Project that explains more about this idea of Nephesh/ Soul and how it fits with the Jewish Shema prayer. (Play video clip).

2. The second thing Jesus mentions is loving our neighbor. For Jesus, it is absolutely crucial that we love our community, including those neighbors we may struggle to love. This is a deep form of love. In the Gospel of Luke chapter 10, this story is told in a different way when a lawyer asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus ask him, what the Law says and the lawyer recites the Shema, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus says, do this and you will live. But then the lawyer asks, but who is my neighbor. Jesus proceeds to tell the story of the Good Samaritan. If you remember this story, it ultimately describes a Samaritan

caring for a likely Jewish man who is wounded. The moral of the story is to care for your neighbor, even if your neighbor is not someone you would normally relate to or naturally love. Our church is seeking to foster a community of love and we are reminded in this story to love our neighbors in Newberg, even when we might have different perspectives on some issues.

3. The third form of love mentioned briefly by Jesus is to love yourself. We are to love God, our neighbor- even the one who is hard to love, and to love oneself. How are you at loving yourself? Do we see this as an important commandment from Jesus. When I look back at the worst days of COVID, I remember that the greatest thing I learned during this time was self compassion and self-love. Everyone was under more stress than usual. None of us had a good frame of reference for COVID. We all were fearful and we were encouraged to be kind to one another and to be gentle with ourselves. Remember the phrase we would say, "We're in this together." I remember one day during this time, I started

listening to different meditations from an app on my phone called Insight Timer. I found a meditation by a Spiritual teacher named Sarah Blondin. She spoke about God's love and loving oneself. She shared with her listeners that when you are vulnerable and hurting, you deserve more love not less.

Friends, do you believe that you are worthy of love? Do you know in your heart that God loves you and wants you to love yourself deeply. When you are hurting in any way, even from your own poor choices, God wants you to give yourself more love not less.

What I learned from Sarah Blondin and other spirituality teachers is that Self love is not selfishness. Self-love is actually a profound way to honor and love God because God loves you so much and wants you to be kind and gentle with yourself always, but especially when you are hurting or struggling with life.

I am learning that for myself and many people, self-love is actually the deepest form of spiritual formation because it is the hardest form of love for many of us.

In my experience growing up in church we do a decent job reminding ourselves to love God and that God loves us. We are pretty good at teaching about loving our neighbor as a Christian value. But to be honest, I think therapists and psychologists and some spirituality teachers are better at teaching self-love than many pastors. But I will promise to teach you self-love in this church because this is what the Holy Spirit is teaching me.

I promise you if you learn that Jesus really values self-love and if you can learn to be gentle and loving with yourself, you will be even better at loving God and others. Self-love does not lead to selfishness. It leads to sacrificial love for God and others. It may be the key to living with compassion for the world.

Three loves are mentioned by Jesus. Loving God, Loving Neighbor, and loving self. This is what life is all about. This is the key to eternal life.

These are the great commandments. On this special day, may we remember that love is what our lives are all about and that God is like a loving parent who invites you to make love central in all we do and to especially not to forget the power of self-love.

Love the Lord with all your heart.

Love the Lord with your soul.

Love the Lord with your mind and your strength.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love the Lord with all your heart.

Love the Lord with your soul.

Love the Lord with your mind and your strength.

Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your neighbor as yourself. (AMEN)

Mark 12:28-31

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."