

## “Passing the Bar”

Matthew 22:34-46

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### Matthew 22:34-46

<sup>34</sup>When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, <sup>35</sup>and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup>"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" <sup>37</sup>He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' <sup>38</sup>This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

<sup>41</sup>Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question:

<sup>42</sup>"What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." <sup>43</sup>He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

<sup>44</sup> 'The Lord said to my Lord,

"Sit at my right hand,

until I put your enemies under your feet" '?

<sup>45</sup>If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" <sup>46</sup>No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Prayer.

Love.

*Agape seid*

– Thou shalt love

the ancient scribes recorded.

The Greek details give insight  
and direction

regarding the will of our Savior.

More a command

than a request

“shalt” should establish

the proper foundation

for the love that it must bear.

More than emotional giddy

“shalt love”

sets the bar high;

demands that the disciple

take responsibility

for words and behaviors;

making ownership a prerequisite

for growth in faith, grace, and place

in God's kingdom.

Taking possession of love  
becoming owners of the gift  
makes us stewards of this amazing grace.

Sinners, you and I alike,  
do we claim the love that God gives?  
Do we tend to the tie that binds?  
Do we maintain it  
by giving it all away?  
For once  
the cosmic, divine pump  
has been primed  
the only way to keep the love flowing  
to is make ourselves a  
barrier free channel  
for God's love to flow  
to the world.

Trust this:

Give it all away

and it will keep on flowing.

Warning to those who fear

who fail to trust

who raise up bigger barns

to stockpile some reserves  
for a rainy day  
... for this day  
the soul will be demanded  
and accounting will be made.

*Primus inter pares*  
Jerome's Latin rings clear  
First among equals:  
Love God  
Love your neighbor  
but love God first.

The apostle Paul  
correctly perceived  
that love  
bears all things  
believes all things  
hopes all things  
and endures all things.  
Love never ends.  
The river from God  
never dries.  
The river from God  
always flows sufficient.  
The river of God's love  
endures from before  
to well after  
time was, is, and will become.

God is to be loved  
with heart, mind, and soul.  
Emotional affection  
unlimited by birth or death  
exceeding the bounds of  
parent or child  
husband or wife  
a sense of underlying oneness  
the extension of the Creator's hand  
the stirring of the birthing breath  
the longing desire to be together  
to share the life  
with trust, honor, and respect.  
Child like curiosity  
impassions the search  
fulfilling the imagination  
of God's rich diversity.

Soulful loving  
speaks the language of eternity  
transcends time  
overcomes every doubt  
trial or pain.

Neighbor is to be loved  
with the same likeness  
as we love ourselves.  
Every neighbor is  
made in God's image  
every last one.  
When we look to our neighbor  
when we reach out to our neighbor  
when we speak with our neighbor  
it must be  
*as if*  
as if our neighbor  
is the Divine.

Not all neighbors are alike  
each is unique  
each reflects a culture  
beliefs and values that are  
the image of God's own.  
Loving some might require  
more investment  
than loving others.  
Loving some might be easier  
than loving others.  
Loving some might even  
bring disgust and disapproval;  
but loving every neighbor  
we must  
- oh, yes, we must love every neighbor  
as much as we love ourselves.

The orphaned child  
whose mother was a housekeeper  
at a sea-side Indonesian resort  
- is our neighbor.  
The elder Serb  
whose husband and son  
were herded together and taken away  
never to be seen alive again  
- is our neighbor.  
The resident

abandoned by those entrusted  
to his well-being  
while storm surged seas rose  
and wind blew  
- is our neighbor.  
The child shot dead  
left like rubbish  
behind a city rec center  
and his distraught, bereaved mother  
whaling on the evening news  
- is our neighbor.  
The inconsiderate neighbor  
whose parking or behavior  
irritates and annoys  
- is our neighbor.

Balance.  
The religious right  
and the liberal left  
become unbalanced  
and spin wantonly,  
dangerously  
out of control.

Love God but forget the neighbor?  
Personal piety trumps social concerns  
salvation becomes the prize  
damnation becomes the threat  
and the graven image  
we use to makeover ourselves -  
assuming the Divine bench of  
judge, jury, and executioner,  
- is the same mold  
that was used to cast  
the defiant Hebrew's golden calf.

Love neighbors but forget God?  
Social activism replaces  
a personal relationship  
a connection built of faith  
with the one who forgives and saves.  
Do good-ers and benefactors  
who  
energize missions  
empower programs  
without a god  
unknowingly tend the soil

and make it fertile  
for planting and accommodating  
agnostic, evil seed.

The importance of balance -  
Love God.  
Love neighbor.  
Jesus combines  
the two commandments  
into standard operating procedures  
for the means of grace  
that are to define  
all His disciples.

Ask yourselves today  
do I have what it takes  
to pass the bar?  
To balance the love?  
Of God and neighbor?

Thou shalt love  
may it be so.  
The word of the Lord, as it has come to me.  
Thanks be to God. Amen.