

“You Shall Love”

Matthew 22:34-46

Proper 25, Year A

Red Ribbon and Reformation Sunday

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

[Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church](#)

Matthew 22:34-46

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 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.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”’? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Prayer.

A Democrat and a Republican, completely unknown to one another, exit their respective churches this morning and walk to a common park bench, to sit and wait for an important phone call. They sit and enjoy the sun and beautiful fall scenery. The Democrat looks over to the other well-dressed gentleman, assumes that since it is Sunday his tie is a sign that he’s been to church.

“Hello! How was your church this morning?”

“Great!” said the Republican. “It is Red Ribbon Sunday and we heard a great children’s sermon about the dangers of using illegal drugs and drug abuse.”

“Ours was great, too,” replied the Democrat. “It is Reformation Sunday and the pastor led us in a litany about how Martin Luther picked up the cause of the oppressed, took the people’s 95 complaints and nailed them to the door of the Roman Catholic church, setting fire to the Reformation and the start of the Protestant movement.”

“Amazing, two different churches, two different themes,” they said almost simultaneously.

After a period of awkward silence, and glancing at their watches numerous times, the Republican says, “What was your Gospel lesson about this morning?”

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The Democrat speaks up and says, “Oh, it is one of my favorites. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves. I have it hanging right on my refrigerator door. It gives me the boost of motivation I need each day before I go to work. I have friends that work in community centers, in health care, in not-for-profits, environmental groups, and for labor unions that all agree with me that this is one of the most important phrases Jesus speaks. You see, we do what we do because we love our neighbors, our fellow man and fellow women, and though life may have dealt them a terrible blow, we can reach out with Christ’s love and charity to let them know that not only does God love them, but we love them, too.”

“Amazing,” said the Republican. “That sounds terribly naive. Don’t you know that the world is filled with dangerous people? There is that nut job in Iran and that dictator with the big hair in North Korea. And don’t forget Osama. How are we to love people like that, for goodness sake? They want to take our lives and destroy all that we’ve worked for, and your God wants us to love them?”

“Don’t you know,” the Republican continues, “that there are too many people who just want a free ride on the public dole? Welfare, disability, Medicare, and Social Security are all just ways for people to take advantage of the good will of socialists like you.”

“I see,” says the Democrat awkwardly, attempting to hide his O’Bama / Biden pin, while looking at his Hushpuppies. A period of awkward silence ensues.

“I must say, our Gospel lesson was similar,” the Republican begins again, “but the main point was that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind. This is what keeps me going throughout the day. When I see the morning sun breaking over the horizon, I can’t help but stop and give praise to God. He is so glorious!”

“As the day unfolds, I give thanks to God for giving me the skills to earn a living, to stand on my own two feet, to work a good job, to raise my family in peace, giving my children the values my parents gave me. My friends are the movers and shakers in the community. They keep the peace and run the courts. They are the ones building wealth and making the world better than what was provided for them, working hard and investing into the next generation. They are soldiers keeping our military strong, protecting all these things I value and hold dear.”

“Amazing,” said the Democrat. “That sounds terribly naïve. Don’t you know that the world is filled with people who need a helping hand? Two thirds of the world lives on less than a dollar a day. If we don’t share our food and medicine, they will die.”

“Don’t you know,” the Democrat continues, “that people are the sporadic victims of their circumstances? Frail elderly can’t afford their nursing home stay; they need our help. The disabled can’t help the fact that they were born with intellectual disabilities, or that they had a middle age stroke. What are they suppose to do? Give thanks to God that they are still alive, now confined to a wheel chair or supplemental oxygen?”

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“Have you ever known poverty so harsh that no matter how hard you try, you can not break out of it’s death grip? Just as much as you give thanks to God for the police officer who slaps on the handcuffs, I’m trying to love the neighbor by working for decent housing, drug rehabilitation centers, and good paying jobs. That’s how I love my neighbor.”

“I see,” says the Republican nervously, shifting his position in an attempt to hide his McCain / Palin pin. A period of awkward silence ensues.

“What I really appreciate,” one says, “is the sheer elegance Jesus lays out his defense in today’s Gospel, drawing deeply from his Hebrew and Jewish upbringing and faith. He quotes from Leviticus to answer the question about the greatest principle of the Torah. He doesn’t break the rules, as he is so often portrayed. He is soundly grounded in the finest points of the Law. By his example Jesus teaches us to follow the Law, but to do so looking through the lens of love. Love God. Love neighbors. Love all that is good and about his Kingdom. Love is always under the Law.”

“What I really like about today’s Gospel lesson,” the other agrees, “is how Jesus can stand up and confront the religious authorities for the unjust and immoral way they apply the Law. He doesn’t do it to destroy them, or organized religion. Rather, Jesus confronts them with love, that they might change their ways. By his example Jesus show us how to love, but to do so looking through the lens of Law. Love God. Love neighbors. Love all that is good about his Kingdom. Law is always kept with love.”

“Say, just what was the Gospel passage you heard in your church this morning? It sounds awfully familiar.”

“I know; I was thinking the same thing.”

Amen.

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