



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity, October 7th, 2012

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

I trust that this scripture sounds familiar to most of us here this morning. It is quoted at the beginning of the almost every Eucharist celebrated here at St. Stephen's. But quotations have a built-in problem, used frequently they become rather unnoticeable and their meaning is watered down. How can we wake ourselves up to the great truth Jesus has given us in this scripture?

Perhaps we should look at what Jesus is saying in the context of the different groups to whom it is addressed. First to the Pharisees; second to his disciples; and third to us the twenty first century church.

The Pharisees prided themselves on their adherence to the minutest details of the law. One of them, a lawyer, in order to test Jesus asked, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Now this question isn't as simple as it seems because the Law, the Torah, contains six hundred and thirteen commandments. The question

is aimed at putting Jesus in a box by forcing him to espouse one position, thus allowing the other lawyers to snipe at and discredit him. But Jesus very simply has them recall the words of Deuteronomy, which define the covenant of God with Israel: the Shema.

"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart"

When Jesus answered the lawyer's question in this way they could only nod in approval. But then Jesus added something they weren't ready for; "And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Here he refers to Leviticus 19:18. "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord." This took the Pharisees aback, Jesus was equating the love of neighbor with the love of God. "And the second is like unto it..."

Secondly, how is this seen in the context of Jesus speaking to his disciples? At the Last Supper Jesus tells his disciples: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another as I have loved you." Not just love each other

as you love yourselves, but love as I have loved you. Jesus provides the model of love, selfless love that would go to the point of laying down one's life for one's friends, or even for one's enemies.

We have to grasp this new commandment that Jesus gives us, that we love one another as he loves us, in the context of the Last Supper, in which Jesus celebrated a covenant meal with his disciples. "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." As the disciples receive the Eucharist at the Last Supper, they are partaking in a covenant meal, an agreement between God and his people made in a new way. They would keep His law to love one another as He has shown the way of love. This is the amazing new revelation of God's love given to us in his only Son, our Lord. Jesus demonstrated it to the point of death.

Jeremiah said: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people...they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquities, and I will remember their sin no more."

Jesus is not only our model for divine love, He also empowers us to love as well. He writes His law in our hearts.

We have looked at Jesus' quotation on the law of love in relationship to the Pharisees and to his disciples. But how does this relate to us in the twenty first century. How are we to love God and our neighbors?

First of all we have to know God. You can't love a philosophical concept or an abstraction of human ideas. You can only love a person. And the only way to find that person, or rather be found by that person is in deep personal prayer. Opening ourselves to the wholly otherness who has opened himself to us in the incarnation of the Son.

How about loving our neighbors as ourselves? We have for our example the person of Jesus, the Christ. We frequently find it easier to love humanity as an abstraction rather than individual human beings. We must pray to be given the gift to love all persons in the way that Jesus loves them. We must love each person with all his good points, and with all his faults, frailties, and failings as well. That is how we love our neighbors as ourselves, by seeing that person as a reality created and loved by God, not as an abstract product of our own minds.

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.