

I must admit to being a little amused to preach this morning. The reason for this is because the last time I stood here, I preached on Luke's description of Jesus being confronted with "the greatest law" test.

There are in fact, three accounts of Jesus being asked or asking this question (as is the case here) in the three synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is of interest, as well, that Biblical commentators are divided as to whether or not this is a single recorded event or three or two separate events. I side with the latter, and here's why.

With an upstart rabbi running around, bucking the System, healing the infirm, gaining a bit of a following, and of course proclaiming himself the Son of God, the question seems just too good to pass up. Whether or not you were an honest seeker of Christ's doctrine, or one set to destroy him, asking

about the Greatest Law, is a great way to get the conversation, or interrogation, underway.

The Shema that we say at every Eucharist, was central daily life of the faithful of Judea and today. It was and is recited every morning and evening, it was and is written on small scrolls and worn around the neck, or strapped to one's arm, by Orthodox Jews to this day. In addition, it was and is nailed to the doorpost of every house in a small box called a Mezuzah, Mezuzah being the Hebrew for doorpost.

And the Shema and the 613 rabbinical laws were a hot button issue of the day. Jews of the day who faced this list felt daunted by such minutia. Many wanted the pairing down of the 365 “do nots” and the 246 “do’s”, and it was a topic of disagreement, not only betwixt the Pharisee and the Sadducee, but a conversation point amongst the people. And why shouldn't it be? Love the Lord thy God with all thy

heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and love thy neighbor as thyself? Sounds a tough order, even for the most faithful, doesn't it? It really is not!

“With all thy heart”, I will safely venture that everyone in this room knows exactly the depth of this love. Whether as a child, loving and pleasing a parent, or as a parent, loving a child in joy or for trying to please them, or any other familial relationship, we can associate with that depth of love. It is not foreign to us, because it is God given.

“With all thy soul”, this part of the law requires no explanation to any of us. There is within each and every one of us, a very deep core sense of our Creator, The One who loved us into existence, and drew our first breath (and I include every Atheist I have ever sparred with in that list).

“With all thy mind”, becomes a bit trickier, as our own free will must enter the equation. “With all thy mind”, however is unequivocal. It means that in every waking action of our day, with every God given breath, we should consider God and his Will in our actions. We should at all times recognize that he is right beside us all, and seeing all.

“And thy neighbor as thyself”, now here is where Jesus’ answer for those that day and every man ever born becomes presumably really difficult. The word for love applied here is the Hebrew “ahab”. It is a determined love. A willful and strong love.

Did I tell you I bought windows the other day? For the first time in 65 years, our bay window will not be a winter screen.

I asked my daughter Catherine to ferret out on the interwebs, the best rated window replacement companies local to us. She gave me a list that would

contain all the usual suspects, but the best rated, was a couple of brothers running their own company, so I called them, and left a message. A few hours later I received a return call from the fellow asking to come over at 2pm, I believe. And then he said, “Do you mind if I bring my son with me, he’s off from school?” Cringingly (I must confess), I said, “No problem.”

When they arrived, I opened the door to father and son who had googly eyes, staring surprisingly at me. Well, when they stepped into the shade of the house, and we got acquainted, I knew why.

When they knocked on my door, they noticed a Mezuzah on the doorpost. Imagine their surprise when a collared Anglican Priest answers the door? And imagine my impression when I saw the young man was wearing a yarmulke. (yamaka)

Anyway, our conversation turned immediately to the Shema, the Hebrew translation from his son (a Talmudic student) and a discussion about classes the father was teaching on the law.

I had willingly invited this man (and his son) into my home to relieve me of my money, and we are discussing God! I don't believe we spent 1/3 of the time talking about windows. We spent most of the time loving God, extolling his laws and praising God together.

I made two very close and good friends that day, and it brings us full circle in the Shema, does it not.

We met, we expressed our love for the One True God, and therefore, our love for each other, and the rest of our brethren as well.

Let's face it, when we are hungry, we feed ourselves, when we are thirsty, we drink; when we're tired we rest; and if sick, we seek a doctor. To love

yourself as your neighbor is to care for them with the same intensity, the same concern, and the same commitment, and actions as we give to ourselves. The fact of the matter is that we humans are a naturally self-centered lot since the time of Adam and will love ourselves more than anyone or anything. But as we learn to love God with all our being, we also learn to be other-centered, and can begin to fulfill the holy command laid before us.

All the rest of the commandments in both law and the Prophets, and really all of the Old Testament, are dependent on these two commandments. Why? Because all the other commandments are only an extension of these two, being details of how to satisfy these laws. If we love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and mind then we won't have any god before him (be it earthly or no), make an idol, worship anything else, or take his name in vain.

Instead we will seek at all times to exalt Him, praise Him, and do what He wants us to do.

If we love our neighbors as ourselves, we won't kill them, steal from them, commit adultery with them, bear false witness against them, covet what they own, and will honour our parents.

A true love for God comes from a loving people. As John, the disciple “whom Jesus loved”, and who stood at the foot of the Cross and did not abandon our Lord said, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is Love.”