

# Hear what the Spirit is saying

Sunday Morning at St. Hugh's in Idyllwild, California

October 25, 2020 | Pentecost +21

## *Collect for Proper 25*

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen. ~BCP 235

## **Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18 NRSV**

*In this lesson the people of Israel are called to lives of justice and love—to be holy because the Lord their God is holy.*

<sup>1</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.

<sup>15</sup> You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. <sup>16</sup> You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord.

<sup>17</sup> You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. <sup>18</sup> 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.

## **1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 NRSV**

*In this reading Paul recalls his first visit to the Thessalonians, the troubles he endured, and the straightforward and gentle way in which he presented the gospel.*

<sup>1</sup> You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, <sup>2</sup> but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. <sup>3</sup> For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, <sup>4</sup> but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. <sup>5</sup> As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; <sup>6</sup> nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, <sup>7</sup> though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. <sup>8</sup> So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

**Matthew 22:34-46 NRSV**

*In the gospel Jesus presents the double commandment of love for God and neighbor, and then asks a question concerning whose son the Christ is.*

<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.

**Psalm 1 BCP 585**

*The Lord makes fruitful those who choose the way of righteousness.*

- 1 Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, \* nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats of the scornful!
- 2 Their delight is in the law of the Lord, \* and they meditate on his law day and night.
- 3 They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither; \* everything they do shall prosper.
- 4 It is not so with the wicked; \* they are like chaff which the wind blows away.
- 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright when judgment comes, \* nor the sinner in the council of the righteous.
- 6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, \* but the way of the wicked is doomed.

*“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”*

Matthew 22:36 NRSV



## A Homily on Matthew 22:34-46

Laurel Mathewson, *Living by the Word in The Christian Century* –<http://bit.ly/1tIARPW>

When I was fresh out of college and chock-full of vocational angst, I was lucky enough to be invited into a book club composed primarily of working and retired pastors, therapists, and professors. One evening over tea and cookies, as this multigenerational group of women delved (somewhat) into the book and (more fully) into the issues of our lives, my angst spilled over into earnest whining: But what are we to do? How are we to live? It’s so complicated!

The response that followed has lingered in my memory. A Catholic theologian in her sixties with short, curly hair looked at me. “Oh, but we have been given a simple code,” she said. “Love God, love your neighbor. When things get overwhelming for me, I repeat again and again: Love God, love your neighbor.”

A few days later, I was taking a winter walk on the beach and came across the unlikely gift of a big and beautiful labyrinth a stranger had left in the sand. Still feeling pretty confused and tormented, I began to walk the labyrinth, repeating those words like a mantra: Love God, love your neighbor. Tellingly, I don’t remember exactly what “next step” emerged for me, but I do remember that as I prayed and walked, those simple words seemed to unlock a door. I left the beach with clarity and relief, the simplicity of the commandment releasing the weighty pressures of countless social codes and expectations.

This teaching of the two greatest commandments is Jesus’ gentle yoke. In Jesus’ time, a rabbi’s “yoke” was a set of teachings—that which was required of you under the law according to a particular teacher. The “easy and gentle” yoke of our Lord—who can often be read as quite demanding—makes most sense to me in light of this historical factoid and this week’s lesson: we yearn for clarity about what is essential, and we long to be guided toward the things that really matter.

It is an aspect of the gospel so basic that it is easily overlooked by preachers. In my early-twenties vocational crisis, I was already a confirmed and hopeless church nerd. I’d heard lots of sermons, been to lots of Bible studies. Yet the liberating force of this basic discipleship teaching hit me like a fresh gust of wind on stagnant sails. Similar memories are scattered throughout my life: I realize that I have been surprised by the grace of this greatest-commandments

gospel again and again. It is not the foundational gospel of resurrection and shouldn't replace it. But for all who are trying their darnedest in a world full of dubious codes for righteous living, this teaching remains good news.

Glennon Doyle Melton—author of *Carry On, Warrior* and the popular Momastery blog—wrote a post in August called “Give Me Gratitude or Give Me Debt.” After receiving unsolicited advice that she should update her kitchen, Melton aims to cultivate gratitude for the bounty of her North American life with new “perspectacles.” Talking about her microwave, she says, “This is the magical box in which I put uncooked stuff, push some buttons, and then a minute later—pull out cooked stuff. It is like the JETSONS up in here.”

Melton experiences gratitude as liberty from desire: “I will not be a slave to the Tyranny of Trend any longer. I am almost 40 years old and no catalog is the Boss of Me anymore.” The gospel offers all sorts of liberation to all sorts of people, and many seem weightier than middle-class psychological unburdening. But don't dismiss the liberation of those ensnared by consumerism. I've been there many times; if you haven't, count that a special grace from God. The powers of marketing are real. We need the Spirit's help and a good word to walk through a store with such a freedom intact. Melton offers a testimony many hunger for.

But what is the difference between this liberty born of gratitude and the liberty offered by the greatest commandments? They function similarly, yet ultimately a liberating code that includes the prayerful love of God and neighbor will be richer and more robust than thanksgiving alone—and more complicated. Simple does not mean easy, and simple commandments have complicated implications. Judging from the holiness code of Leviticus 19, this paradox has always been the case. What does it look like in 2014, in this place, to love your neighbor? To love God above all else? Whenever I think that these are tired old questions, I know I am not really paying attention.

How did I love my poor neighbor today? Did I even think about my poor neighbor? In what ways do I continue to defer to the ways and the will of the “successful” class? Paul knows that even proclaiming the gospel to new faces can be an occasion for greed and false flattery. Living by a different holiness code than the ones on offer from contemporary culture takes discernment. It also takes courage. We are freed from expectations we find onerous. But we also may be required to give up praise and positions that gladden our egos.

LOVE GOD, LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR.  
THIS IS ALL THAT'S REALLY ASKED OF US.

A Catholic theologian in her sixties