

ST PAUL'S CHURCH (RONDEBOSCH)

SUNDAY 25 OCTOBER 2020

TWENTY FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

READINGS: DEUTERONOMY 34:1-12//PSALM 90:1-6, 13-17 //

1THESSALONIANS 2:1-8// MATTHEW 22:34-46

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**O God light of the minds that know you
Life of the souls that love you
And strength of the thoughts that seek you
Bless the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts
AMEN**

Henry, who was an elderly man, was unhappy because he had lost his favourite hat. Instead of buying a new one, he decided he would go to church and steal one out of the entrance porch when the worshippers were busy praying.

When Henry arrived at the church an usher intercepted him at the door and took him to a pew where he had to sit and listen to the entire sermon on 'The Ten Commandments.'

After the service, Henry met the priest at the door, shook his hand, and told him, 'I want to thank you Father for saving my soul today. I came to church to steal a hat and after hearing your sermon on the 10 Commandments, I decided against it.'

The priest answered, 'You mean the commandment ' Thou shall not steal' changed your mind?'

'No, 'said Henry, 'the one about adultery did. As soon as you said that, I remembered where I had left my old hat.'

Today's gospel passage is the last of three encounters between Jesus and the religious authorities. The Pharisees and the Sadducees had been trying to trap Jesus for a while. In this morning's passage they try to trap him again by asking some scriptural interpretation of the Law.

In V36 they asked Him ***“Teacher which is the greatest commandment of the Law?*** It was the Pharisees who, through the study of Scripture, had taken the 10 original commandments and turned them into 613 different rules, or commandments of their own making.

(Just imagine obeying 613 commandments (rules), we can't even keep the Ten Commandments) However the Pharisees were meticulous in the observance of

the Law. They wore their good deeds upon their sleeves. They were out for a reputation for purity and goodness and therefore obeyed the law to be seen by men.

But Jesus not only knew the way to avoid their trap. He also knew exactly what they needed to hear.

And he answered them saying: *V 37-40 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. A second likewise is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."*

With this answer Jesus didn't actually come up with two new commandments. He was quoting two separate verses from the Torah, the books of Moses. The first was from Deuteronomy 6:5 *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength"* the second is from, Leviticus 19:18. *"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself, I am the Lord"* These two greatest commandments were not literally listed among the Ten. But the call to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and to love your neighbour as yourself certainly gets right to the heart of them. (First 4 commandments of our ten have to do with loving God and the other six have to do with loving our neighbour). It acts as the perfect summary of the intent behind all of God's Law.

This answer silenced the Pharisees because they could not argue against it. With his answer Jesus had not singled out any one commandment and nor had he just given the answer that they were all important. He had cut through all of the negativity that comes from seeing God's Law simply as obligations to be fulfilled and be seen by men.

God's Law is not about some test that needs to be passed in order to earn the right to stand before him. God's Law is meant to get us to the heart of God's character. Through his Law we get to see that God seeks to preserve and respect life and relationships – our life and relationship with him and with each other. So at the heart of God's Law is the call to love because love is at the heart of God.

This brings me to our theme for this morning

WHAT IS AT THE HEART OF BEING A FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST?

1. Firstly at the heart of being a follower of Jesus Christ is **LOVING GOD**
V 37 *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*

This means we have to love God with everything we have ---our flesh, our spirit and our conscience thought. It means we must give God a total love. A love which directs our thoughts; a love which is dynamic of our actions. A love which is total commitment of our life to God. (**when you were in love)

The heart of being a follower of Christ is not about some test that needs to be passed in order to earn the right to stand before him. But at the heart of being a follower of Christ is to love God in the most intense degree. To be obedient to him and to trust Him and this will impact on the mindset and heart we have for others.

2. Secondly at heart of being a follower of Jesus Christ is *“ To love your neighbour as yourself”* V38

So my friends we are challenged this morning not to love only God but to love our neighbour also. The question is who is my neighbour? Yes it can be my family (my husband my wife who are suffering from dementia, Alzheimer, my troublesome daughter or son who I care and love), it is my friends, the person next door to me.

But neighbour means more than my family, friends and the person next door to me.

In Luke’s version of this story for today, the Pharisee asked the question: “Jesus, who is my neighbour?” He wanted a definition of neighbour and so do we. Jesus said, “There once was a man walking down the Jericho Road and he was beaten up by life and left there to die. Who is our neighbour? They are the people who are beaten up by life, who get smashed up by life: in the gospel of Luke, it is the poor, the marginalized, the blind, the lame, and the lepers. And who gets beaten up and smashed up in our world, our

country in our society today? The poor, drug infested families, hungry people, the sick, the homeless, the abused, the elderly, the lonely, the depressed, the unemployed those who have lost their jobs especially during this time of COVID 19

We live in a world marked by greed, selfishness and putting ourselves first. We take every advantage where we can because we need it and we forget about the marginalized and the underprivileged.

Who is my neighbour? It is not only my family, my friends or the people next door but those who are being beaten up by life, those who are different from me

The will of God is that we love Him in such a way that we put His will first in what we do, think and what we say and live in such a way where we see our neighbor just as important to us as we are.

Every word, every action, every thought of us must be tested against those few words: whatever I do I must ask myself is this something that expresses my love of God? Is this something that shows my love for my neighbour?

CONCLUSION

The heart of being a follower of Jesus Christ, is Love. And it's a radical kind of love and commitment. It's not the easy kind of love. It's not about sitting around with those who think the same way that we do, it is about engaging with those who think differently, and listening thoughtfully and offering our view respectfully, and caring for them in the midst of it all

“A blind man and a lame man happened to come at the same time to a very bad place of the road. The former begged the latter to guide him through his difficulties. How can I do that said the lame man? As I am scarcely able to drag myself along. But if you were to carry me I can warn you about anything in the way --my eyes will be your eyes and your feet will be mine. With all my heart replied the blind man. Let us serve one another so taking his lame companion on his back they travelled with safety and pleasure,”

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?