

Sermon

Pentecost 21, Year A

Matthew 22:34-46

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus 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.

Sermon

Today we heard from Matthew,

Who write about Jesus's last hectic days.ⁱ

Even though there was a lot of dangerous tension between

Jesus, the Pharisees and the Sadducees,

In his last week, Jesus left the safety of his home, in Galileeⁱⁱ,

And walked 60 miles

to the dangerous territory of Jerusalem.

From Jerusalem, Jesus moved out into the wide World

and into all of God's Creation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Which is where we will find him today!

The Sadducees and the Pharisees^{iv} disagreed about everything

except that Jesus's program was a threat to their way of life.

They both agreed: One way or the other, *Jesus had to go.*

And Jesus knew that.

A streetwise guy might have hidden in the shadows,

But, instead, Jesus picked a fight with them. ^v

He challenged the Hebrew leaders because they were acting

on their own agenda, instead of God's prophetic messages:

“For many are called” *Jesus said*, “but few are chosen”.

Including You Guys. ^{vi}

“Pretty soon”, he told them, “you’ll be out of work!” ^{vii}

If the leaders wouldn’t do what God called them to do,

Then God would call others to do the work.

And God did. And God still does.

We are the People who God is calling today.

Before the Pharisees approached Jesus,

They discussed how Jesus had silenced the Sadducees. ^{viii}

“If that Carpenter nobody could do that to the Sadducees,

what will he do to us?”^{ix}

So, the Pharisees devised a trap that even Jesus couldn’t escape:

A no-win theological argument^x...

What is the "greatest commandment?"^{xi}, they asked?

And Jesus answered

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your mind”.

“Love your neighbor as yourself”.^{xii}

It was the perfect answer. And it still is!

With Jesus there is never a no-win scenario!

What does *loving your neighbor as yourself*, look like?

What kind of love is that?

Matthew used just one Greek word for the English phrase

“you shall love”.^{xiii}

That word – *agapeseis*-- is a variation of the word *agape*,^{xiv}

Agapeseis means “to be full of good will”.

It means to show love in what you do *and* what you say.^{xv}

That’s not a casual or easy kind of love.

It’s the kind of love that endures.

It’s the kind that won’t let us abandon someone.

It’s the kind that won’t let us give up on that person,

or trade him in for a new model.

It the kind of love that God’s showed us,

when He sent Jesus here, to die for our sins.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Okay. And *Who* is my neighbor?

We’ve heard that question before.

The Greek word for “neighbor” is *plesion*.^{xvi}

A “neighbor” is more than a friend.

A neighbor is more than some who thinks like us and

acts like us and votes like us.

Jesus meant that a “neighbor” is *anybody you might run into*.

There is no religious, or age, or political, or national,
or skin color or gender test, ^{xvii}
because a “neighbor” is anybody and everybody. ^{xviii}

Jesus called the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the scribes,
because they had abandoned their sacred leadership roles
and had refused to embody the Will of God.

Jesus still calls His people out. We are Jesus’ Church,
and even in these Crazy Virus Daze, he calls us out.

We are.... Each one of us.... One church and One people!
Isn’t that right?

In our world of “sensory overload” and boundless choices
And me-centered lives, Jesus calls us out.
Wherever we are. Whoever we are.

Jesus is calling me, and Jesus is calling you.
Commit yourself to walking Jesus’s Way.
One Day at a time!

**“Love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your mind”, and
“Love your neighbor as yourself”.^{xix}**

Jesus says:

Treat your neighbor with as much generosity,
as you might treat ourselves.

Forgive others as we would want to be forgiven.

Do that Right now. This moment.

No matter who is in the White House or Congress or Austin.

“Love your neighbor as yourself”.

-AMEN

ⁱ The Gospel seems to have one complete “pericope”, and fragment of another, the former beginning at Matthew 22:34 with the word “When”. The NIV begins Matthew 22:34 with the word “hearing”, whereas the NASV, the RSV, and the ASV all begin with the word “but”. Each of these translations, by their choice of those alternative words, signals the beginning of a new thought. The Greek phrase variously translated as “when” and “but”, is *oi de*, which is often read as “but”, “moreover” or “now”. This, again, would signal the commencement of a new point of thought or line of discussion.

The NIV’s variation “Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees...” speaks to the Koine Greek word *akousantes* (*ακούσαντες*) which is to say, “hearing”. Thus, Matthew 22:34 could be read to say, “But when the Pharisees were hearing” or “When the Pharisees were hearing” or some other similar combination of words. At any rate, the phrase signals the commencement of a new line of thought, at once following the phrase, at 22:33, “When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching”.

The lectionary, as mentioned above, runs through Matthew 22:46, but my Unit does not. Rather, the Unit in question ends at Matthew 22:40, with the phrase, “All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments”. The excluded language of the Lectionary, beginning at 22:41, begins, in the NIV, with the phrase, “Now while the Pharisees were gathered together” The use of the word “now” (*nun, νύν*, in Koine Greek) is also a classic marker for the

commencement of a new thought or discussion. Thus Matthew 22:34-40 stands as a distinct pericope.

ⁱⁱ Nazareth is in the region then called Galilee.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus entered Jerusalem in a form of triumph, certainly knowing that there he would also suffer horribly and die. (See, Matthew 16:21, and 20:17-18). His entry into Jerusalem on a donkey (a referral to Zech 9:9), his not discouraging the crowd's hosannas, his "prophetic" action in the temple, virtually guaranteed his suffering and death, as he laid the foundation for the questions "By what authority are you doing these things"?, and "Who gives you this authority?"

^{iv} They were the leaders of a conquered people that Romans thought were kind of strange. They insisted, for example, that there was only One God.

^v And that's what was happening in today's Gospel.

^{vi} See, e.g., Matthew 22:1. Jesus' curse on a fig tree, spoke symbolically to Israel's failure to bring forth fruit. This, like the vineyard, would be given to the Gentiles, to produce fruit for the Lord, when Israel would not do God's work. NB: Isaiah 5 compares Israel to a vineyard; Jesus used that same analogy in his parable.

^{vii} "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." Matthew 24:2 (NIV)

^{viii} Matthew's Gospel reveal the sharp conflicts between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. Notably, Jesus is revealed, in a different light, in each of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). They, plus the Book of Acts, are the foundation for the Epistles. These few books they comprise nearly all of the historical record, and supply virtually everything we know about Jesus's life and work. From them we know that Jesus was a Jewish man, whose life and career reflected God's interactions with, and promises to, Israel, and to us, as God's people.

^{ix} Even though there was no love lost between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they could work together, to take Jesus out.

^x If you're a Star Trek fan ... the Pharisees thought, they had trapped Jesus in the Kobayashi Maru no-win training scenario.

^{xi} A question that still rings bells and makes us think.

^{xii} "All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments". See, Matthew 22:37 and Deuteronomy 6:5

^{xiii} See, “agapeseis” (αγαπήσεις) which might also be translated as “you shall love” or “you love”.

^{xiv} Which is one Greek word that we’ve all heard a million times.

^{xv} On other key words or phrases, please note... the words “Great” or “Greatest”, come from the Koine Greek word “megas” Μέγας, variously defined as referring to something which is the most intense, or being the largest, or having the greatest stature and age. The term is also used to speak to the ranking of one thing to another thing, and in so being used, that the or person which is “megas”, is esteemed more highly than the others, and attributed to it is more eminence or excellence. Think of our use of the word “great” to describe a King or Queen.

“Is like it”: In his discussion about the greatest commandment, Jesus asserts that the second commandment is like the first. The phrase “is like”, in Koine Greek, is *homoios oμοιός*, from the root word *homou*, i.e., “the same”, or “akin to the other”.

Homou is an adverb describing a kinship nature between two or more persons or things. Here, it would not be similarity in the sense of “resemblance” of one to another, or feeling, acting or thinking the same. Rather, the word signifies that the two are comparable in importance or significance. Combining two of the words described in the key word research, we understand that the second commandment is as “megas” as is the first. They are, in respect to the state of being “megas”, of like nature.

^{xvi} *Plesion Πλευρίων*, a neuter derivative of *pelas*, is defined as “neighbor”.

^{xvii} Jesus moved from talking about his accusers, to talking about the people around them, and to talking about the entire world.

^{xviii} In Matthew Chapter 23, Christ engages in a lengthy tirade against both the scribes and the Pharisees, who he first addressed in the third person, but late went to the second person (“you”), i.e., those immediately present, i.e., his audience. Moving from “all y’all” to “y’all” Jesus’ intended to indict a system of ranking people, including the Scribes, the Pharisees, and their followers.

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