

An Open and Generous Spirit

Rev. Catherine MacDonald © 2009

Deuteronomy 6: 1-9

Psalm 146, p868

Mark 12: 28-34

November 1, 2009

Will you join me in a moment of prayer? May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen,

Good morning!

Don't you love my fine clothes?

Don't they make me look important?

I love being a scribe and having people look up to me and respect me.

In case you are wondering, I am that scribe that Jesus was talking with that day...

The one who asked what was the greatest commandment of all...

Jesus bugged many of us scribes and Pharisees... although not me!

I liked to think of myself as being open and interested in learning from lots of different people.

But there were those who certainly didn't appreciate him.

As one of my fellow scribes said, "Who was he anyway? A peasant from Galilee..."

Sure, he had quite a number of followers by this time, but to try and tell us, the keepers of the Hebrew faith, what God's most important law was?

That was quite arrogant... at least according to the other priests and scribes...

But me, I was interested...

In your scripture it seems as if the conversation between Jesus and I was very short... as if I asked what the greatest commandment was and Jesus told me and I agreed...

Well, let me tell you.... There was MUCH conversation between those two paragraphs...

And it wasn't as if Jesus and I were arguing... but I wanted to understand...

After all, the people came with their sacrifices and burnt offerings, just as Abraham and Moses and so many before them had come with their burnt offerings...

And here all of a sudden, Jesus was telling the people that those things weren't important!

And that the most important thing... indeed the greatest law of all was to love God, love neighbour and love self...

That sure required some re-thinking...

I notice that you don't have any burnt offerings...

Is it true then, that Jesus has such an impact... that you no longer sacrifice animals as part of worship?

I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it myself...

So you Christians have embraced the belief of love God, love neighbour, love yourself as the foundation of your worship!

Wow!

You must be much more easygoing than the people of my time were...

We found the first commandment easy...

'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

Well, let's not say easy... but certainly easier than the second one...

Love your neighbour...

Tell me, do your neighbours not get on your nerves at times?

How do you love them?

I tell you, I wish some of my neighbours would move!

And those are the people that I know.

When I asked Jesus who my neighbour was, he asked me what I thought.

That's one of the things that drove most of us scribes nuts about Jesus, he wouldn't give us the answers!

He always wanted us to come to the answer ourselves.

So I thought...

My neighbours.... Well obviously those who lived close to me...

Jesus looked at me and said... And???

Well of course, my kinfolk, even those who had moved away...

Once again, Jesus said, And???

Well of course, all of us Jews were neighbours...

Jesus looked at me once again....

By this time, I had run out of neighbours!

Then Jesus said, “What about the poor? What about the sick? What about the people in the surrounding countries?”

What????? These were my neighbours???

I could scarcely believe what Jesus was saying...

No wonder the other priests and scribes were so upset with him.

But then he looked at me and asked, “What do you see when you see the poor, the sick, and the foreigners?”

Well, that is exactly what I saw: the poor, the sick and the foreigners.

He said, “When I look at these people, I see children of God, who are hurting.”

Well, yes... but I never thought those people were my responsibility...

Then Jesus asked me if I would explain welcome and hospitality to him....

Well, finally a questions that I could answer!

Because we had been aliens in Egypt and been led out of that land into the dessert and fed by our God with manna and quail... it was our sacred responsibility to offer hospitality... not just to those we knew... but also to strangers....

I felt pretty good about that answer.... Until Jesus asked me... would you call the poor, the sick, the foreigners, strangers your neighbours?

Well, I had to answer yes...

What about your sacred duty to them?

I was confused.... I was supposed to extend hospitality to these people?

Well, I didn't know about that!

That wasn't something I had really thought about before.

So Jesus asked me to keep thinking about it...

That's something I really liked about Jesus, it didn't matter if you didn't get it right away, he kept on encouraging and helping you to understand...

So we kept talking...

About how he had been born in a foreign land and had finally found welcome in a stable...

How he traveled from place to place and gathered people around him, no matter what their circumstances... because he believed so strongly in those two commandments.

And somehow God provided...

And then he asked me to think of a time when I had been welcomed... perhaps unexpectedly...

Just welcomed, not because I was an important scribe, but because I was me, Ezra.

Well, I couldn't think of anything right away, and Jesus said that was okay, but to keep it in mind...

And not long afterwards I was traveling when the rains had been bad and I was unable to make it home...

I was traveling with a couple of my servants and we got bogged down in the mud...

We came to a farm and as we appeared at the gate... the woman of the household saw us and said you look tired and hungry... do you need a meal and a place to stay the night...

Well, we most certainly did!

She sent my servants to the barn where it was warm and dry and she took me into her house and I was able to bathe... and her husband gave me a set of his clothing and then I ate with them at their table.... And my servants ate with us!

I felt as if I were a royal guest... and let me tell you... I didn't look like one when she first saw me...

But she welcomed me.... And my servants...

When I asked her why she did this, she said, "You appeared... and you needed me... and I have heard this Jesus talk about loving God, and loving neighbour as I love myself."

"So how could I see you and your servants suffer from cold and hunger when I had more than enough?"

"That wouldn't be loving God or loving neighbour."

Incredible.

This woman, this uneducated woman, knew more about loving God, and loving neighbour than I did... a learned scribe of the Hebrew faith.

So yes, then I was able to say to Jesus, indeed, those are the most important commandments.

Love God, and love your neighbour as yourself.

And so I was a changed man...

Still a scribe, but a different kind of scribe...

One who kept the faith by welcoming into the temple those who had been excluded...

And it seemed as if my days were brighter...and love and compassion blossomed just like those flowers you placed in memory of important people in your lives who have died.

People who built this church... people who attended this church... people who loved this church...

Those people had an open and generous spirit and who loved God and love neighbour.

They are no longer with us... but their mission, based on love God and love neighbour, can live on in each one of us.

For your family...

For your church community...

For the wider community...

For the world...

For all of us are children of God.

May love and compassion for all the world bloom just like these flowers.

And Jesus' commandments will live on.

Love God, and love your neighbour as yourself.

Thanks be to God, amen.