

1+1=1 (4th is a 4 part series – The Role of LAW) Matthew 22:34-46
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV – 18th Sunday after Pentecost (October 16,) 2011

Matthew 22:34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

⁴¹Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴²“What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, ⁴⁴‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”?’ ⁴⁵If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Today is the final sermon a four week series on **GOD’S LAW FOR US**. The first week’s sermon set the thesis for the series, namely: **GOD’S LAW IS A RECIPE BY THE CREATOR FOR HOW THE CREATURES ARE MEANT TO LIVE A GOOD LIFE.** The Law (aka TORAH) is the DIRECTIONS FOR GOOD LIFE. That sermon introduced the notion of what would it mean to us, if we **quit treating God like a JUDGE and like a loving parent, instead.**

The following week, we got specifically into the Torah, looking at the very beginning of the BIG TEN:

- 1. You shall have no other gods before me. And,**
- 2. You shall not make for yourself an idol.**

We looked at the story of the Israelites in the wilderness, who played around with a golden calf, and called it “God.” And we, along with them, realized that **God alone is a good enough foundation for life.** We need such a foundation as God to get us through the rough times, the waiting times, the anxious times.

Last week, we moved from the **First Testament** of the first two weeks, into the **New Testament** and were reminded that Jesus said that He did not come to REPLACE the Law. Rather He came to FULFILL the Law.

We looked at how it doesn’t matter how well our problem solving skills nor thinking processes may be – if we don’t start with God at the center, then all of our “life

calculations” will be skewed. If we begin with $1+1=3$, then our math will be “off” in all we do.

We also learned, from Jesus’ example, that **God’s Law is meant to be liberating, not confining**. God’s Kingdom loves diversity (look at God’s lavish use of color in creation) and **God’s Law opens possibilities for life’s issues, not confines them**.

In today’s Gospel lesson, we once again find the Pharisees trying to trick Jesus up – trying to paint Him into a corner from which He is unable to escape. Those silly Pharisees! You have to give them credit for not giving up!

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

Most scholars I’ve read today have settled on the number **612** as the sum total number of commandments recognized in Jewish Law at the time of Jesus. **Is it any wonder that the world was ready for a Savior?!** If there are **THAT many ingredients** in the recipe, it **surely** would be **hard to bake the cake again**, if it got left **out in the rain in McArthur Park!**

So, Jesus takes advantage of their little scheme, to help us realize the essential of Torah. He does an interesting thing with their question. **They ask for ONE** and He (at first blush) **seems to give them TWO**:

³⁷He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

But He also said: the **“second is LIKE it”** which made me think that He was talking about **TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN**.

Then almost a score of years ago, I came across the teaching of **Dorotheus** – the founder of a monastery in **540** A.D., in Gaza. He described the unity of these two commandments, on which hang all the law and the prophets, using a WORD PICTURE:

Think of a wagon wheel, in which God is the hub- in the center. Each of the spokes going from the rim of the wheel to the hub is the life of each person. When we follow the first commandment – loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind – we move closer to the hub. However, as we move in love along the spoke of our life closer to God, what is the relationship of our life of our life in love to the life of our neighbor? Indeed, as we move closer in love to God, so, too, we move closer to our neighbor.

So, too, this word picture helps us see that the absolute impossibility of moving closer to God in love but not loving our neighbor. And if we move unlovingly away from our neighbor, so, too, we move away from God.

When we put the TWO commandments together in this fashion, “with the second like the first,” then (as the sermon title reminds us) **1+1=1.**

Permit me, to just briefly stray from the intended text of the sermon, as occasioned by my picking up the bulletin before I left the office on Friday afternoon. I feel obligated to make one correction to a mistake in the bulletin. It’s not a mistake that the staff of Saint Marks made in the preparation of the bulletin, but a mistake made by the publisher of the bulletin covers.

Please note that on the front of the bulletin cover, there is a MISquote of the scripture. It says “you must love your neighbor as YOU LOVE yourself.”

That is **NOT** what Jesus said. Not here or in any Gospel. And actually – since Jesus really did speak of what the law reads in the First Testament, there is NO FIRST TESTAMENT REFERENCE THAT SAYS “you must love your neighbor as YOU LOVE yourself.”

That tends to be the way that people often interpret the commandment. But, it is not what the Bible says.

Love your neighbor AS yourself

Is NOT the same as

Love your neighbor AS YOU LOVE yourself.

Love your neighbor AS YOU LOVE yourself is $1+1=2$. It involves making sure that you know how to love yourself properly, so you can love your neighbor in like fashion.

But the commandment as Jesus spoke it (AND as it is recorded in the First Testament) Love your neighbor as yourself is $1+1=1$.

Let me illustrate with a bowling ball: (and I apologize that I used this same illustration a little over four years ago in a sermon, but some of you may not have been here that Labor Day weekend.)

If I were to drop this bowling ball on my Big Toe, it would hurt. It would really hurt! But I would not be able to say "OW! My Big Toe hurts, but the rest of me feels just fine." No, I hurt. Not just my Big Toe.

When I love my neighbor AS myself, neighbor and I are one. When my neighbor has pain, it is also my pain. When my neighbor has joy, it is my joy. When I love my neighbor AS myself, my neighbor's joy is never a source of resentment, because neighbor got the joy instead of me. It IS my joy as well.

1+1=1 when we love our neighbor as ourself.

You see, this is **NOT merely** a commandment on how to **do this or don't do that**. This is a **recipe** for a full and abundant life, **when it changes how we see things**. When we see things **as God created them to be**.

In last week's sermon, I offer a preview of today's sermon, when I said:

In the final chapter of this series, next week, we will discover the RIGHT TOOL for how to discover all the options and how to pick the correct one for that particular circumstance.

And I need to be a man of my word, and do this.

When Jesus said, ⁴⁰ **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets**” He was talking about something more than descriptions of BEHAVIOR. He was talking about something upon which BEHAVIOR IS BASED. He was talking about the INNER CONDITION of the human.

When we think of commandment as rule, then all our attention is based on outward behavior. When we think of commandment as INGREDIENT for good life, then we look inward.

It is our inward being that helps us pick the right choice of outward behavior.

*“Living in relationship of Love with God and with neighbor is the essence. Love is also an interior reality If you **STRUCTURE YOUR AWARENESS** around Love of God and of neighbor, you will be able to make your way through the labyrinth of laws and the demands of the prophets.”ⁱ*

“Once upon a time, a certain man hurriedly headed out the door for work. In his path was his three-year-old son playing with blocks. The man patted the boy on the head, stepped over him, opened the door, and went outside. Halfway down the walk a guilt bomb exploded within him.

“What am I doing? ‘he thought to himself. ‘I am ignoring my son. I never play with him. He’ll be old before I know it.’ In the background of his thoughts he heard the pounding rhythms of ‘Cat’s in the Cradle.’ Harry Chapin’s ballad to lost fatherhood. He returned to the house and sat down with his son and began to build blocks.

“After two minutes, the boy said, ‘Daddy, why are you mad at me?’

“It’s not only **what** we do that counts but **from where** we do it. Our actions come from different places inside us. These different places affect the quality and effectiveness of what we do. We may think the inside is of little consequence as we push into the outer world, but it can change the impact of our actions. **‘Steeling**

ourselves' and doing something is not the same as **'opening ourselves'** and doing the same thing.

“Playing blocks out of guilt is not the same as playing blocks out of love, and the difference is quickly spotted, even by three-year-olds, especially by three-year-olds. Doing something because it is expected and doing something from the heart are two different experiences. Perhaps, this is why **Jesus**, in Matthew’s Gospel, **insists that we forgive our brothers and sisters from our heart**. (Matthew 18:21-35, esp. v. 35.)

The LAW is the Gift from the Creator to the Creature. It’s not about God keeping score and punishing us for not getting it all right. Rather, it is about a loving parent trying to show a beloved child how to look at life, how to feel about neighbor, how to live a good life, from the heart out.

As I said, back in the beginning: you are certainly not required to abide by the teaching of this sermon series. I hope that you were able to try it on and see how it fits. You are free to choose how you look at God and how you feel about life.

If your relationship with God works better with the notion of God as a scorekeeper and a Judge; and life about a series of duties meant to be kept, then so it is.

As for me, I find it not only easier to accept the Love of God in Christ when that relationship is based on loving freedom and law is recipe for abundant life, it is what I hear Jesus teaching us to do. When I STRUCTURE MY AWARENESS on God’s love and the love of neighbor as self, the decision making seems so much easier.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

ⁱ John Shea, *“On Earth As It Is In Heaven – The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers”*