

19th Sunday after Pentecost
October 23, 2011

Pastor Bill

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, with their question about the resurrection, after he had previously silenced them concerning their question about paying taxes to Caesar, they came with another question to test him: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?"

Do you know all the laws that the Pharisees were talking about?

When the exiles returned from captivity in Babylon they wondered how they could prevent a future such event from happening again. So they searched the Pentateuch, the first five books that are now included in the Old Testament written by Moses. They discovered 613 law codes and they implemented them into the fabric of the way they would live faithful lives to God.

King David mentioned eleven ways to live a faithful life to God:

- 1) Walk blameless with God.
- 2) Do what is right.
- 3) Speak the truth.
- 4) Do not slander.
- 5) Do no evil.
- 6) Do not reproach a neighbor.
- 7) Despise a vile person.
- 8) Honor those who love God.
- 9) Do not go back on your word.
- 10) Do not loan money for interest.
- 11) Do not take bribes.

Micah mentions three:

- 1) Do justice.
- 2) Love kindness.
- 3) Walk humbly with God.

Habakkuk mentions one:

- 1) Live by faith.

Jesus answers the Pharisees with two:

- 1) 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.
- 2) And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Is it possible for us, who are still learning to walk by faith, to keep the greatest and first commandment?

I believe that we would all respond, "It is impossible for us to keep it while we are still in our pilgrimage here on earth."

We can not do it, but God can do it in us because for God all things are possible!!!

If we only partially devote ourselves to following God's Way of living out our lives, we become a divided self and being thus divided we threaten our mental health because we can not live both ways of life at the same time without suffering from schizophrenia of some sort.

As a boy, a philosopher thrust his head through an iron railing to get a better view of something, later in life, as he thought about that incident he asked the question; "With my head on one side and my heart and body on the other side, on which side is the True Me?"

The dilemma of a divided-self must be solved for we can not faithfully serve two masters at the same time.

A self divided in its following of God's Way of Life is grievous to God.

If there is "Joy in Heaven" over a repentant sinner, there is "Grief in Heaven" over a life stricken with self-division over obedience to following God's Way of Life.

A divided-self is also a threat to our neighbors.

A person can not say that they love God on Sunday and steal from their neighbor (whether that neighbor is their boss or their employee) during the rest of the week.

A person can not say that they love God on Sunday and despise or anger their parents and others in authority the rest of the week.

And of course the reverse is also true.

A person can not say that they love God on Sunday and despise or anger their children and other children in their care the rest of the week.

A person can not say that they love God on Sunday and hurt their neighbor in any way during the rest of the week.

And we could continue statements like this for all of the Ten Commandments.

The dilemma of a divided self must be resolved in us, and of course we realize that this can only be accomplished through God's working in us our whole life-long, for we struggle continually with our two selves –

the Old Adam and the New Adam, the Old Eve and the New Eve that is in each one of us.

If we choose to let the Old-Sinful-Self reign in our life, then our faith life suffers, withers away, and can eventually die.

If we choose to let the New-Christ-Like-Self reign in our life then our faith life grows and hopefully reproduces itself by nurturing others in becoming disciples of Christ as well.

Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Well, how do we love ourselves?

God has show us how much He loves us by sending Christ Jesus to redeem us from sin and death, thus we must honor our own life for we know how precious we are to God.

We love ourselves when we fear, love, and trust God above everything else.

We love ourselves when we call on God in prayer, praise and thanksgiving.

We love ourselves when we regard God's Word as holy and gladly hear and learn it.

We love ourselves when we respect, obey, love, and serve our parents and others in authority.

We love ourselves when we help our neighbors in all their physical needs.

We love ourselves when we love and respect our spouse.

We love ourselves when we help our neighbors improve and protect their property and means of making a living.

We love ourselves when we defend our neighbors, speak well of them, and explain their actions in the kindest way.

We love ourselves when we help our neighbors keep what is theirs.

We love ourselves when we encourage our neighbor's spouse and workers to remain loyal.

In the second part of the Gospel Lesson for today, Jesus asks the gathered Pharisees, "What do you think of the Messiah?"

It is a good question for there were many conflicting thoughts concerning the Messiah, the Christ, and His coming.

One thought was that the new Davidic King, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, would rescue God's people from their distresses, would subdue their enemies, would purify Jerusalem, would make Jerusalem a truly Holy City, would cause the wealth of the world to flow to Jerusalem, and would bring about complete world peace.

Another thought was that there would be NO Messiah, for God would directly intervene in human history and usher in the New Age.

A third thought was that a Divine Superhuman Messiah, clad with the Might of Heaven would break into human history conquering all peoples, judging all peoples, obliterating all sinners, and exalting all the righteous.

Other thoughts present at the time were:

If all of Israel would together repent for one whole day, then the redemption of the Messiah would come.

If all of Israel would together keep only two consecutive Sabbaths as perfectly as they should be kept, then the redemption of the Messiah would come.

These thoughts help explain why many of the Jewish religious leaders were so upset with Jesus, for he did not keep the strict demands of the 613 law codes, and worse yet; Jesus seemed to be hindering the coming of the Messiah for He often desecrated the Sabbath by doing things forbidden for Sabbath observance.

These and other thoughts concerning the coming of the Messiah were deeply ingrained in the Jewish culture. They hoped, prayed, waited, and longed for the Messiah to come and to change their life situation.

So Jesus asks a good question for the Pharisees to consider, "What do you think of the Messiah?"

Now we could criticize the Jewish leadership and people for not responding positively towards Jesus as God's sent Messiah, but Jesus was not fulfilling the hopes and dreams that they had developed over hundreds of years concerning the coming of the Messiah, so they doubted Him.

A couple of questions for us to consider:

How do we understand the ministry of Jesus?

How does our faith in Jesus as God's sent Messiah call us into true discipleship and into true ministry today?

Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

We had boldness in our God to declare to you the Gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. Our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or an attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

God calls us to share the Gospel Message boldly in our words and in our actions even if suffering and conflict arise because of it.

We are not to be divided in our striving to serve God as the number one priority in our life.

We are not to be divided in our understanding of God's Message, interpreting it to please the current society in which we live rather than in pleasing God.

The truth and power of God's Message does not change in the midst of our continued struggle with the dilemma of our divided-self.

Let us choose, as much as we possibly can, to follow the summation of all the law as stated by Jesus:

Let us love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind.

And let us love your neighbors as yourself.

Let us pray: O Lord, our God, help us to proclaim the Gospel Message faithfully in our words and in our actions. May our life shine before the whole world so that our proclamation of the Gospel may not be eclipsed by the darkness of our divided-self.

Amen.