

**Sermon Preached by The Reverend T.J. Freeman
at Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
on the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 25, Year A)
October 26, 2014**

Matthew 22:34-46

Love God, Love you Neighbor, Change the World

When I was younger I used to ride around with my grandfather while he was working. He very kindly referred to me as his apprentice. Though to be honest, I am quite certain that many things took longer because he had to explain what we were doing. I spent a lot of time running back and forth to the truck to grab tools or a spool of wire. It is possible that he would purposely leave things in the truck so that he would have a few moments of peace and quiet while I hunted for the tool that he requested.

There is one day in particular that still stands out in my mind. We were at a farm to do some work for a friend of his. It was an especially humid day. We had been crawling in out of the grain bin as we wired up a new dryer. Every so often we would take a break to sit on the tailgate of my grandpa's truck and drink some water. I remember seeing my grandpa wipe sweat from his brow with his handkerchief, so I immediately took my handkerchief from my pocket and wiped my brow. Some time later his friend, Leo, came out to see how we were doing. He looked at the two of us and said, "You boys look like a couple of drowned rats, have you had lunch yet?" My grandpa told him no, that we had not had lunch yet, and that if he was any sort of decent fellow that he would buy us lunch at the restaurant. Leo responded very quickly with you drive, I'll buy.

After a very welcome lunch in the air-conditioning, we were on our way back to the farm. As we were driving along Leo asked me if I knew three basic rules of being an electrician's apprentice. Shocked, I responded that I did not know the three basic rules of being an electrician's apprentice. How could my grandfather have neglected to tell me these things? He then asked if I had my notepad. Of course I did, as a young electrician's apprentice I knew very well that I did not go anywhere without my notepad. He looked at me and said, 'well get it out and write these down.' So I took pad and pencil from my pocket and waited on baited breath.

When the Pharisees approached Jesus in the temple he had been teaching for some time. His authority to teach had been questioned. He had told multiple parables. He had spoken about resurrection and paying taxes. All of these teachings had been worth hearing, but when the lawyer approached Jesus he wanted to get to the heart of the matter. He wanted to know what was the greatest commandment. This is where if Jesus had been my grandfather's friend Leo he would have asked the lawyer if he had his notepad, because the lawyer was going to want to write this down. Unlike twelve year old me, the lawyer knew the answer to his question.

The law was extensive and covered many subjects, but the purpose was singular. The lawyer knew it, his friends knew it, and if Jesus were one with authority he would know it. Jesus not only knew the purpose, but he lived it, he breathed it, and he embodied it. In twenty-eight words Jesus spells out for the Pharisees and for us the most important things in life.

When I had my notepad in my hand and was ready to begin writing Leo started to list off the three basic rules of being an electrician's apprentice. Number one; never hold two wires in the same hand. Number two; the boss is a jerk. Up until this point I had really believed that Leo was going to impart some brilliant wisdom. Of course, twelve year old me was equally disappointed and impressed, because I thought it was a more than a little funny that he was calling my grandfather a jerk to his face. Number three; payday is Friday. Needless to say, the wisdom of Leo was not quite up to the level of teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, but those three rules have stuck with me all of these years.

Jesus looked back at the lawyer and answered 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.' This answer still applies today. When we contemplate how we are supposed to live our lives as disciples of Christ, this is the answer. We are called to love God with all of our being and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

This transformation in our being does not happen simply and it does not happen instantly, but if we are willing to pray and to try and orient ourselves to God's purpose, amazing things will happen. Our view of the world will change and the world's view of us will change. We will see a beauty and holiness that we had missed before. They will see the new in our eyes and in our being. This is what people saw in Jesus; they saw something new and different. They saw a man whose whole existence was lived in love towards God and neighbor; they saw a man who would change the world. That is the inevitable effect of living our lives in love with God and with our neighbor.

So my fellow disciples, do you have your notepad and pencil handy? There is probably a pencil in front of you in the pew and it is ok to write on your service bulletin or you can take out your smart phone and write it down there. I am going to give the two rules and the effect of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. There are eight words in total that I am asking you to write down. Number one: Love God, number two: Love your Neighbor, and number three: Change the World.¹

Write it on the paper, write it in your phone, but most importantly write it on your heart and your mind. Let these three simple phrases be your guide throughout every day. Be swept up in the power of the greatest commandment. Be the disciples that we are called to be. Love God, Love your Neighbor, and Change the World.

¹The concept of Love God, Love you Neighbor, Change the World was first introduced to me through a Facebook post. The Diocese of Southern Ohio has bumper stickers with that phrase on their website (www.dohio.org/advertising). Not sure who owns the intellectual rights to the phrase but I endorse and support it whole-heartedly.