

How We Love  
Mark 12.28-34  
Sunday, 11/4/18  
St. Charles Ave. Baptist Church  
Rev. Elizabeth Mangham Lott

What a scene to envision: Jesus and his rabbi colleagues are discussing scripture and how to interpret it. How do you make a path out of all of these words? And what kind of path is it going to be? What's the theme of scripture that absolutely must become the theme of your life? Is the goal of scripture to check off the right boxes? Make sure you're giving just enough, sacrificing enough, keeping yourself just pure enough, avoiding sin enough, judging those who don't enough? Is the goal of scripture to draw you into an awakesness and awareness that shapes the way you live and move and have your being? What's the point of all of this, they argue.

Jesus grabs two threads of Torah and weaves them together—Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19—the plot of the story is love. Which commandment is greatest of all? Love. Love God with your heart, your soul, your mind, your strength. Love your neighbor. Love yourself. And something that almost never, ever happens in friendly debates actually happens in this exchange—the scribe says, “You’re right.” Yep, you’re right. The way of Love “is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Then Jesus acknowledges the man’s wisdom, Mark tells us, and Jesus leans in with a grin on his face saying, “You’re not far off now. The kingdom of God is as close to you as breath with that awareness.” And no one dared ask Jesus any further questions.

We fantasize about a discussion going this way. Thanksgiving is coming, my friends, and some of us know we’ll find ourselves around some awkward family tables at which we’ll either keep shoveling pie into our mouths to keep them quiet. If we don’t, there’s a good chance of heavy eye rolling, at best, or a shouting match with someone storming off from the table telling us we should just move to California. How often do we lay out the whole of what we believe in a calm, cogent way only to have our conversation partner say, “Yeah you right,” at the end.

Love is the command. It all boils down to this one truth, and then the hard work of living it out begins. When we don’t know what the next right step is, what does Love call us to do? When an African American church outside of D.C. is almost bombed on a Saturday night just a week after a Pittsburgh synagogue is attacked for enacting the commands of love and holy welcome, what does Love call us to do? The point of these

gatherings and this study and this community and this life together is that we are doing something with what we hear and see and experience. Are we showing up to check off lists and then feel good about it? Are we showing up to draw each other and to be drawn mysteriously and miraculously into a deeper awareness of the power of God's Love?

And lest you think this sounds too Hallmark Christmas Movie, hear the words of Valarie Kuar, public figure, civil rights activist, and founder of the Revolutionary Love project, who writes, "[L]ove is not just a feeling but a form of sweet labor — fierce, bloody, imperfect, and life-giving. In this era of enormous rage, Revolutionary Love is the call of our times. We are birthing a future where love is a public ethic."<sup>1</sup>

The words of Love in Deuteronomy 6, the first and greatest command Jesus quotes, are followed by a set of instructions

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Take care that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

This way of Love won't be easy. You'll have to work to remember this. You need to teach Love to your kids and carry these Love lessons back home with you and on the road with you. Before you go to bed at night and when you wake up in the morning, you recite the words of Love again. Mark your body with Love, mark your home with love, draw a circle of love around the spaces where you live and work and worship. Take care that you do not forget because this instruction is the most important one.

Now how does Jesus decide this instruction is the most important one? In their conversation about scripture, the scribe and Jesus are asking about how scripture is weighed. When the text can be used to make two, opposing arguments, when friends can gather in two sanctuaries on the same street with the same bible and come to opposite conclusions about how to engage the world, what do you do with the text? What matters most? What's your hermenutic—what's your method of interpreting scripture—what's the lens through which you see it all? This lens matters because the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.revolutionarylove.net>

lens through which we see either draws us into a heart of compassion and empathy and holy loving kindness or draws us into a heart of self-preservation, closed doors, small circles, and judgment. (There are more than two lenses, of course, but Jesus is arguing here that the lens of Love is the greatest one.)

Professor Bill Loader notes, "... by citing the second command, Jesus is making a profound theological move which seriously defines the first command and reveals his theology. The God to be obeyed is the God of love and compassion and, by implication, that understanding will determine what loving God and keeping God's commandments means. There is no room for a tension or opposition between the two, no divided loyalties. Where love and law conflict, law gives way, or, better, love always goes beyond and, in that sense, fulfills the law. It controls law and not vice versa."<sup>2</sup>

How we love is what matters to God. Are we loving with everything we have—heart, soul, mind, strength? Are we loving our neighbors? Are we loving ourselves? Everything else is built on this foundation of Love. The Revolutionary Love project has a long pledge (which you can read and sign at [RevolutionaryLove.net](http://RevolutionaryLove.net)) that takes on this foundation of Love and makes a pledge to rise up in Revolutionary Love by declaring love for all who are in harm's way, declaring love even for our opponents, and declaring love for ourselves. Love is the way to which we must commit ourselves anew. Over and over again, write it on our hands and heads and doorposts and gates. Recite this commitment to love with your friends and in your home and here in worship. Commit yourself to Love, do not give up, and do not forget.

Dr. King knew this way was not easy and would require mindful choosing, especially in times of rage, if there was any hope at all to being beacons of Love in a dark world. He wrote,

"I'm concerned about a better World. I'm concerned about justice; I'm concerned about brotherhood and sisterhood; I'm concerned about truth. And when one is concerned about that, he can never advocate violence. For through violence you may murder a murderer, but you can't murder murder. Through violence you may murder a liar, but you can't establish truth. Through violence you may murder a hater, but you can't murder hate through violence. Darkness cannot put out darkness; only light can do that.

And I say to you, I have also decided to stick with love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to humankind's problems. And I'm going to talk

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<sup>2</sup> <https://onemansweb.org/the-interpretation-of-love-mark-12-28-34.html>

about it everywhere I go. I know it isn't popular to talk about it in some circles today. And I'm not talking about emotional bosh when I talk about love; I'm talking about a strong, demanding love. For I have seen too much hate. [...] and I say to myself that hate is too great a burden to bear. I have decided to love. If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love. And the beautiful thing is that we aren't moving wrong when we do it, because John was right, God is love. He who hates does not know God, but he who loves has the key that unlocks the door to the meaning of ultimate reality."<sup>3</sup>

Friends, we remember the Love of God today. We write it on our hearts. We recite Love with our children. We enact a ritual of Love at this table remembering Jesus the Christ who led a love revolution to the cross, through the grave, and into the mystery of resurrection as his Love is now spread like light through a prism as each of us lives out that Love in our lives. If you give yourself to this Way, if you long to remember and recommit to that Love, if you need to be nourished and strengthened by it that you might possibly love God, love your neighbors, and love yourself, then I invite you to this Love feast set before you at the table today. How we love matters, my friends. Let us be remember and recommit in this meal today. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Where Do We Go From Here"