**October 26, 2014 – 20th Sunday after Pentecost**

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In our lectionary today, we’ve skipped over the fun exchange between Jesus and the Sadducees concerning the resurrection. Sadducees are yet another Jewish sect who had a lot of political power and a lot of money, and they were formidable enemies. One of their beliefs was that there was no resurrection, so it’s ironic that they ask Jesus a question on that topic. Needless to say, Jesus shuts them down too, with one of his now-typical theological end runs.

I can just see the Pharisees rolling their eyes in disgust by now. Their own disciples, the Herodians, and now the Sadducees have all tried to trick Jesus in one way or another, and have all failed miserably. Well, if you want a job done right, I guess you have to do it yourself!

So the Pharisees trot on over to the Temple, bringing with them a Scribe, which is another name for a Torah lawyer. And they ask him the million dollar question that had probably been debated more than anything else over the years by rabbis, scholars, and lawyers: “Which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

Well, the laws are found all over the Torah – in Exodus, where the ten commandments first appear, in Deuteronomy, where they are repeated and expanded, and in Leviticus, where they are added to even more. So Jesus has a lot to choose from.

What he chooses to say underscores that he understands the Scriptures very well. He starts out with the second line of the most famous and familiar Jewish prayer, the *Shema*. This is the prayer from Deuteronomy 6 that starts out, “Hear O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One.” In a later verse, all Jews are commanded to repeat this prayer morning and night, and they are taught it as little children.

The verse that Jesus specifically refers to is Deuteronomy 6:5 - : “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” But what Jesus actually says is “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your MIND.” Keep that in the back of your mind for a minute.

Jesus doesn’t just give them one great commandment (although he does put them in order of importance) – he gives them two. Next he quotes the last part of Leviticus 19-18, which says, “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

Then he ties his two choices together by saying, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” In other words, not only are these the most important, but every other law in the Torah comes out of them. This is a pretty bold statement, when you consider that he’s talking to people whose business it is to study the law.

But let’s back up a little and take a look at the way he changes these oh-so-familiar verses. Deuteronomy says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might,” and Jesus changes “might” to “mind.”

The Hebrew word for “might” is “*meódeka,*” which means richness, strength, or abundance. Another way of putting it might be “with all your resources.” Certainly dedicating all your resources to God is very much an idea that Jesus would endorse, but for some reason, he wanted to emphasize something a little different here.

The Greek word for “mind” is “*dianoia*.” More than just “mind,” *dianoia* means understanding, intellect, or insight. It means actively using your brains, along with your heart and soul, to love God. It means to make a reasoned choice to love God.

This goes very well with the verb for love, which is “*agapao*.” *Agapao*, is the verb form of the word *agape*, which is often translated as Godly love. It’s not an emotion. It’s an action. This kind of love is something you do, not something you feel, and it’s always defined by God. This is the point Jesus is getting at. Your mind is the organ that decides to love, although often with input from the heart and soul, of course, and Jesus is saying to use that mind to decide on the love that is defined by God.

So Jesus is telling us that the most important thing is to actively decide to love God. But how are we supposed to do that? God is ineffable, and sometimes unknowable. Rational decision making requires facts, and everything we know about God bypasses that intellect. But here is Jesus telling us to rationally choose to love God. How?

We can choose to love God by loving our neighbors. By loving our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus strips down the original Leviticus verse so we won’t be distracted by the part about vengeance or grudges.

Jesus knows us well. He knows that if we are given parameters, we will stick to those and not think outside the box. “Well, I haven’t held a grudge today, and I haven’t sworn vengeance, so I must be good in the loving my neighbor department!” But it’s so much more than that, especially if by deciding to love our neighbors we are deciding to love God.

We tend to think of neighbors as those people around us, but the word, in the Old Testament understanding, which is what we’re dealing with here, is much more expansive than that. It carries the sense of “every other person.” This is certainly what Jesus means here. Not the people who live up the street, but every single person you encounter or even think about.

And this love – this agape - for our neighbors that we are actively choosing to do, can be expressed in so many ways. It’s limited only by our own creativity. Generosity, charity, kindness, helpfulness, forbearance, tolerance, acceptance, and gentleness, and so much more, are all part of this action, and things Jesus wants us to actively seek out to do for others. THIS is loving God.

By reaching out to those in need around us, we are loving God. By helping those less fortunate than us, with no strings attached and no judgment given, we are loving God. By choosing – by rationally deciding – to put others’ needs before our own, we are loving God.

A few of us are working on an idea of providing a meal – hopefully on a regular basis – free of charge to the jobless and working poor of Huron. This kind of activity is ideal for showing our love of God through loving our neighbors. I hope many of you will want to get involved with this project, or perhaps come up with your own (using those wonderful, God-given minds of yours), or will generously contribute towards making this ministry a reality at Grace Church.

The wonderful thing about loving God with everything we have, and loving our neighbors as ourselves is that the more love we give away, the more there is to give. It’s a never ending commodity. Jesus embodied this when he came down to live and die as one of us, and he has shown us how to follow him in the way of love.

All we need to do is to decide to love, and then to act on that decision every day. Starting now!

Amen.