

# TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

## 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary + Faithful Journey

### Invitation to Bible Study

**Mark 12: 28-31** - One of the scribes came near and asked Jesus, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."



#### 1. What's most Important?

A scribe asks Jesus what God's greatest commandment is. At a time and in a culture which revered "The Law" above all else, the question "Which commandment is the first of all?" was the equivalent of asking "What's the most important thing in the world?" It was that big a deal!

#### 2. Big questions have complicated answers!

Jesus does not follow the rules implied by the scribe's question. There is not one, single, unqualified important thing. There are two!

#### 3. We are to put God first.

We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength. Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-5** - Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

#### 4. Heart, soul, mind and strength.

We are to love God with all that we are; with our whole being; with our whole lives. Not just for an hour on Sundays. Not just in our heads or hearts. *Strength* implies action. What *do* we do to love God?

#### 5. The mind is important!

Jesus adds an important idea to the word of Deuteronomy. Jesus adds "mind" to the equation. The followers of Jesus are invited to use the gift of intellect in addition to the passion of the heart, the piety of the soul or the strength of the body. Christians are *thoughtful* people. We take account of others. Christians are *thinking* people. We are not invited to check our brains at the church door.

#### 6. Putting God first is not the whole story!

The answer "love God above all else" would have gotten Jesus off the hook. No one would have disputed the truth of that answer. However, Jesus quotes Leviticus 19:18 in addition to Deuteronomy.

**Leviticus 19:18** - 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.

Paul uses the same quotation in Galatians 5:14 and Romans 13:9 as a summary of the law. Hillel the Elder, who lived in the century prior to Jesus, observed. "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn." (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a.) Jesus' was aware of important ideas among the teachers of his time.

## 7. **Jesus: Love our God; love our neighbour.**

Putting the commandments to love God and to love our neighbour *together* distinguished Jesus' teaching and lies at the heart of the Gospel. Ours is a gospel of love.

## 8. **You cannot love God without loving your neighbour.**

Just as “loving God above all else” was an inadequate answer to the scribe’s question, so is loving our God without loving our neighbour. You can’t have one without the other. Christianity is not about you and God or me and God; it’s about God and us. God, first! Us, with God, together!

## 9. **To love our neighbour is to participate in God’s love.**

Jesus invites his followers to love their neighbours (as they love themselves) thereby participating in God’s love for all of God’s people. Jesus viewed as “neighbour” people who were discounted by others. Eg. Samaritans. In the parable of the “good” Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) Jesus responds to the question “Who is my neighbour?” and does two things: First, he expands the definition of neighbour to include Samaritans. Second, Jesus suggests that the spirit of the Law is as important as the letter. The priest and Levite honour the letter of the law by not allowing themselves to touch blood, thereby becoming unclean. They are faithful to the letter of the law. However, the Samaritan, who was bound by the same law, honours it’s spirit. He is willing to risk his spiritual well-being for a “neighbour”. There is a whole other Bible study here!

# Invitation to Great Stewardship!

## 10. **Putting God first invites “first fruits” stewardship.**

To put God first yields the “first-fruits” principle of stewardship. In ancient cultures, first fruits were an offering to God of the first —and best— of the harvest. In contemporary stewardship, first fruits implies honouring God before all other claims on us rob us of the opportunity to do so.

## 11. **Examples of “first fruits stewardship”: making a commitment and supporting PAR.**

Making a yearly financial commitment to support Trinity’s ministry and PARticipating in PAR are examples of “first fruits” stewardship. We give “off the top” as part of our financial planning and we see our offerings to be no less important than any other claims on our personal finances.

## 12. **Participating in Trinity’s ministry is great stewardship**

People who participate in Trinity’s ministry are acting out of love for God and neighbour and directly helping to expand the neighbourhood and neighbourliness of Trinity Church, a place where all are welcome! See the beige **Invitation to Ministry** piece in the 2009 Faithful Journey Stewardship kit. There are countless opportunities for people to be directly involved in Trinity’s ministries.

## 13. **Supporting Trinity’s ministry is great stewardship**

People who make a financial commitment to support our ministry are acting out of love for God and neighbour and thereby helping to expand the neighbourhood and neighbourliness of Trinity Church, a place where all are welcome! See the white **Invitation to Financial Commitment / PAR** background piece and yellow **Financial Commitment / PAR** response form in the 2009 Faithful Journey Stewardship kit. There are important ways in which to offer financial support for Trinity’s ministry.

## 14. **Homework: Gratitude and Saying Thanks**

Read Luke 17: 11-19 Notice who it is that, once again, sacrifices his own well-being (delays the required priestly declaration of healing), this time to say “thanks.” What do we learn from this episode in Jesus’ ministry? There is an orange **Let’s Say Thanks!** response form in the 2009 Faithful Journey Stewardship kit.