

## Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

June 15, 2014

### Reflections on the Great Commandment

Ps 8 and Mark 12:29-31  
(715, 690, 802, 410)

Jesus is pretty clear on this one.  
No parables with multiple levels of meaning,  
no obscure references that make little sense in a different time,  
no secrets that only the initiated understand.

Here's his summary of all the law and prophets,  
the greatest of the commandments:

*Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;  
And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul,  
And with all your mind, and with all your strength.  
The second is this,  
You shall love your neighbour as yourself.*

Love God with every dimension of your energy –  
spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical.

But don't stop there.

If you love God with your whole being,  
you will love your neighbor and yourself.

They all go together.

You can't have one without the other two.  
That's just the way God made things work.

If your love does extend to all three,  
then your love to any one of them is distorted and destructive.  
It's a hindrance rather than a help to the well-being of creation.

The Greek word Jesus uses here is *agape*.

It is the most spiritual and comprehensive of the Greek words for 'love.'

*Eros* refers to physical love and *philia* to love of family and friends.

*Agape* reaches more deeply into the depths of our beings  
and refers to our most basic of attitudes towards reality.

It encompasses the way we see things and the way we act in their midst.

It is enabled by God's love for us.  
That's what Jesus was doing.  
He was making God's love freely available to all of us  
once and for all.  
No conditions any more.  
God's love is yours.  
Now, go, trust and enjoy it.  
Live out of and into that love.  
It's the greatest thing in the world.  
It's the energy of life itself.  
And it's yours for the accepting,  
steadfast, constant, trustworthy.  
Nothing in all creation can separate you from that love.

When you have accepted this as the reality in which you live,  
loving God, neighbour, and self is your normal way of being.  
For the gift of *God's* love, you live out *your* love in gratitude.  
The glory of God, as the early church Father Irenaeus said,  
is humanity fully alive,  
flourishing as companions of God and each other.

The best way I have found to imagine this love  
is as the energy that sustains and enhances abundant life.  
In John's Gospel (10:10), Jesus says,  
"I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly."  
This is said in the context of explaining what a good shepherd is,  
one who owns and sacrifices for his beloved sheep.  
Jesus identifies God with that kind of deep, caring love.

This kind of energy flows around us and through us and within us.  
It is literally the 'breath of life.'  
It does not originate with us.  
It originates with God.  
We do not control it.  
God controls it.  
We cannot destroy it.  
God sustains and enhances it.

Our only choice, and we make this choice far too often,  
is to ignore it.

This usually happens when we are caught up in fear,  
when we are infected with an anxiety that distorts our ways of seeing reality.

Our own narrow and selfish well-being and interests become paramount.  
Everything and everyone become threats.  
We hunker down into the bunker of our fright  
and cut everything else off.  
Within that bunker, any degree of violence is permissible.  
After all, our lives, and those of *our* love ones, are threatened.  
Our lives become a video game of revenge and dominance.  
We strive to be the last group standing.

My fear, reinforced over and over these days,  
is that that bunker mentality dominates our world today.  
That's how far too many people see reality.  
That's how we see reality far too often.

So, the great commandment upon which we have been reflecting this morning,  
challenges that world view.  
It says, quite simply and directly,  
that is not the way God sees things  
and not the way those living consciously in the grace of Jesus Christ  
should see things.  
Love, not fear, is the most powerful energy in the world.  
That's the way God has made things.  
We have the freedom to ignore and dispute that,  
but the price is high in terms of abundant, flourishing life.  
Living in a bunker is costly to every dimension of your being  
– physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.  
You shrink and atrophy in that kind of darkness.

It's the light of God's love  
that enables us to flourish abundantly,  
to live in the full physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual energy  
that is the gift of God to all his beloved children and friends.

It's the light we remember every Sunday morning  
when one of our young people lights the candle  
and we sing our candle lighting hymn,  
a prayer, really, that the light of God's love will revive and renew us  
in our loyalty to the great commandment.

So, go out into the world God loves this morning and every morning  
remembering to love God, love your neighbours, and love yourself  
so deeply and so abundantly that you will be the blessing  
God created you to be.