

## **“Are you fully human?” Mark 12:28-32**

**“And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And 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 neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.” And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him.”**

This is a lovely passage that we have for our today’s meditation. Evangelist Mark, guided by the Holy Spirit has recorded this interesting conversation: about the two most important commandments.

The commandments may be hard to listen to, because... yes, they always show our sin, and many don’t like it. I personally love when God’s law shows my sin, for then you can truly appreciate how undeserved God’s love is and how much Jesus has done for you. Today we will look at [1] what these two commandments mean and [2] how could we possibly keep them.

**“And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him...”**

Where was Jesus when this conversation took place? He was in the Temple in Jerusalem. What was Jesus doing in the Temple? Disputing, arguing. Engaging in disputations about correct understanding of the Word.

That was one of His regular activities. That was one of regular activities for everyone interested in God’s will, for everyone interested in the truth. People realized how important the truth is, especially when talking about the eternal life.

Do we have disputations these days? Probably not. People have different concerns these days, and correct understanding of God’s Word is not among them. The truth is not among them either. Many don’t believe anymore that there is such a thing as the truth, or God’s judgment, or eternal life.

Instead, we are so much more concerned about, yes, about relationships. The most important thing, the first commandment these days is – you shall not offend! It kind of makes sense if there is no such thing as the truth.

If there is no correct understanding of God’s message, only opinions... and all of them equal, of course. Then let’s forget about the truth and focus on relationships.

We may look down to the Scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees, but they had something that we have almost lost. They had this passion to understand God's message, to understand God's will for our lives, and to live accordingly.

You can criticize their mistakes, but you can't deny their passion. Today most of people and many of those who identify themselves as Christians don't care about these things anymore. Instead of inquiry and disputations, there is apathy and ignorance.

Then, as Mark records, there was this scribe, who seeing that Jesus had given great answers to His opponents, came to Him and asked: **"Which commandment is the most important of all?"**

Pastors would love to hear questions like this. 'Pastor, which commandment of God is the most important?' But, the reality is, that we almost never hear questions like this.

You need to be a certain type of a person to ask a question like this. First, you need to believe that there is God. Then you need to believe that one day you will stand before Him and He will evaluate you and the thoughts and desires of your heart.

How you have used gifts, talents and opportunities that were given to you. You need to believe that God has revealed what He expects from us and how we should lead our days. You need to believe that you are accountable before your Creator.

If you believe this, then you ask questions like - how can I be a better Christian, what should I do to love God and what should I do to love my neighbour? Be honest with yourself! Have you asked these questions? If not, what does it tell... are you really interested to follow Christ...

**Jesus answered, "The most important is, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And 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 neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these."**

There are two main demands from God, two main things He expects you to do – to love Him and to love your neighbour. These are not some kind of arbitrary commands. What your God asks from you is – to be who you are created to be.

We could say that these two commandments summarize what it means to be fully human, created in God's image and likeness. That is, to live in loving relationships with your God and with your neighbours.

Just think about it, we are the only creatures, who are created to be with our Creator, to listen to Him, to be His representatives on earth. He created us so that we could rejoice in His presence. He wants to speak with you, and to be with you.

How do we respond? So often we choose to ignore Him. To pretend that He doesn't exist. Our ability to communicate with our Creator and Redeemer is what distinguishes us from the rest of creation. What do we do with this uniqueness?

Do we appreciate it and rejoice in it? No, so many desperately want to become like other species, led by instincts, doing whatever we desire. And living that way people still want to believe that thus they are becoming more advanced than those who want to be with their Creator and Redeemer.

This is what is described in Gen 3 as the Fall of humanity. As the very essence of sin. That we don't want to acknowledge God as our God, but we want to be like gods ourselves. We are not going to submit to anyone.

The irony is that by doing it we don't lift ourselves up, we don't become more advanced, instead, we lose our uniqueness and demean ourselves. We lose the Image of God, and become like other species, fighting for survival, everybody for himself. That's why it is called the Fall... and not the Rise.

Jesus quotes the most important commandment from the book of Deuteronomy. Pay attention at how it is phrased: **"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."**

With all your heart and soul and mind and strength. Now, let's reflect about our hearts and minds and wills! What thought, desires and emotions dwell in us? You know it well. Would you volunteer to show your thoughts on this screen for an hour, so that everyone can see them?

What would we see? Our love towards God and our neighbour? In fact, our hearts and wills don't care about God, and not much about the neighbour. We want to love ourselves more than anything. Our hearts are enslaved to focus on ourselves.

Let's think about love. How can you love someone? You can love only someone whom you know. How do you know anyone? When you talk to them, when you listen to them and gradually learn what they are like.

And if you find that they are beautiful inside and outside, you begin to like them. If you see that they care for you and consider you as more important than themselves, you begin to love them.

If you experience that they live to serve you and to lift you up, your love grows even stronger. And what if they offered to lay down their lives to save you from death? What would your attitude be then?

How much would you love someone who does it for you? How much would you desire to express your gratitude, and respond to such love? How much would you want to please this person?

Your heart would overflow out of gratitude and joy, out of awe and excitement, out of desire to be with this person. This is what the Triune God does for you, and this is what Jesus meant by “love your God with all your heart and mind and will”.

This is what we all are expected to do. But also: **“You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”**

Love your neighbour! Sometimes people think that ‘to love’ it is just such a vague notion, which at the end means nothing, or may be – be nice, don’t offend. For Jesus ‘to love means’ a summary of all commandments. It is very specific.

To love your neighbour then means to honour, obey, respect and love your parents and all to whom authority is entrusted. It means to help and support your neighbours in all their lives’ needs. It means to be chaste in your relationships.

It means to help your neighbours to improve their situation and to protect their property. It means to come to their defence, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light. This is what it means ‘to love’.

The thing is that God doesn’t need from you anything. He is the One who gives you everything. Your neighbour is the one who needs your service. This is why these two commandments are inseparably tied together.

This is why Jesus said: **“There is no other commandment [singular] greater than these.”** These two make one, and they reveal what it means to be fully human. From God, from Jesus Christ we receive and to the neighbour we give.

We receive so that we could give. And, by the way, this is also the secret to true happiness. Almost everyone knows that it gives more joy to give and to serve, than to receive and been served.

Our problem is that we are enslaved to focus on ourselves. Why? Because we don’t know God, we don’t love Him and don’t trust that He will provide for us, therefore we are focused on providing for ourselves and are not free to serve others.

**Now, the key question. How can we do this?** How can we keep these two the most important commandments? It seems almost impossible. If God would simply demand us to keep them, we would be doomed.

Our love of God begins with listening to Him, and being with Him. Then you can be shocked and amazed by what you hear and learn, what kind of person the true God is. That is so, so contra intuitive.

Yes, He knows your heart, all the hidden and shameful thoughts and desires, your rebellion against Him, He knows you exactly as you are. And He loves you first, exactly as you are. He pours His love and His gifts over you in so many ways ... even if you don't deserve any of them.

He created you, He sustains you, He gives life to you and provides for all your daily needs. Before the creation of the world He predestined you to be with Him in His Kingdom through His Son Jesus Christ. It is a great mystery.

Jesus Christ came and lived a perfect life. He fulfilled these two commandments on behalf of us. He loved God the Father from all His heart, and He loved us more than Himself. He showed His love to the Father in perfect obedience, and love towards you laying down His life so that you could live through Him.

He loves you with all His heart and mind and soul and strengths and He loves you even more than Himself. The love that He expects from you is only a natural response to God's love towards you.

When you read, study and meditate about God's words in the Bible, this is when Jesus Himself speaks to you, this is when the Holy Spirit reveals what God is like. This is how your love of God begins.

When you respond to His invitation and come to Him in the Divine Service, He Himself is present among us, speaks to you and blesses you. The more you get to know the true God through His Son Jesus Christ, the more His love enables you to love Him.

His love begins to transform you, Jesus begins to restore your full humanity, and you are again enabled to love your God and trust Him, and when you can trust your God with your whole life, then you are also free to love and to serve your neighbours.

This is how these two greatest commandments work. It's very simple. They are fuelled by love of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, as we as restored human beings try to live the life for which we are created.

That's about it. It is such a blessing to know God's will and to strive to keep these two commandments. I pray that we all would leave today with this question: "How can I respond to God's love? How can I be a better Christian?"

Amen.