


***“The Big Reveal”***  
**Sunday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017**  
**21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

 **Matthew 22:34-46 (NRSV)**

**[Read from NRSV Bible]**

**This is the Word of God for the people of God.**

***Thanks, be to God.***

**[2<sup>ND</sup> Service: Affirmation of Faith]**

This morning’s Gospel text offers us one of the most familiar and most-preached texts from Matthew.

We have certainly used it a lot here; after all, it’s printed on the front of our bulletin: ***“Love God. Love Others. Change the World.”***

Well, that isn’t an *exact* quote, but it carries the same sentiment.

This text is the best example of God’s priorities for the world: God...Others...Self.

But, is that the only message to take away from this episode in Jesus’ life?

What is the other ***“big reveal”*** here?

**Let us pray...** Lord, this morning we come to a text that is familiar to us, in fact maybe too familiar. Help us to see that there is more here than we may have noticed before. Guide us to hear what Jesus says about himself. We pray in His name. **Amen.**

## **[MESSAGE]**

A version of this same story is also found in Mark and Luke's gospels.

In Mark's version we hear Jesus quote the commandments in the same form as we find them inside the mezuzah at every Jewish household's door post; The Shema.

In Luke's version, Jesus proclaims these commands as the conclusion to the Good Samaritan parable.

Any one of these three versions of the Greatest Commandments offer ample opportunities for preachers and teachers to talk about God's priorities and how we should live them out in our world today.

**Any one of these would make a great sermon.**

What I noticed when I read this Lectionary selection was that it did not stop with the obvious lesson.

Many preachers might even stop reading at verse 40 and head for the message; I've done this myself in the past – looking at “*the love's*” text is pretty easy to preach.

Reading beyond verse 40 to the end of the passage presents another topic that may be harder to wrap our heads around.

In this much-less-familiar passage, an important truth is revealed.

So, in his answer to the Pharisees' question, Jesus gives two separate commands.

The “*greatest*,” is to love God;  
the “*second*,” is to love neighbor.

Jesus says the second is “*like*” the first;  
he does not collapse the two, as if love of God is equal to love of neighbor.

Maybe we should not collapse them either;  
clearly, love of God is the priority here.

By itself, this brings up all sorts of questions.

How does one love God?

How do we imagine loving an unseen, spiritual being who created everything?

What does our love look like in comparison to the undeserved, unconditional love we believe God offers to us?

Can we describe this love or find any words to contain it?

Those are huge, life-altering questions that we don't often consider.

It is so much easier to talk about loving your neighbor and linking that to charitable work, acts of kindness, and calls to justice.

Ok, so Jesus clearly wants us to think about these two commandments and what they really mean in our lives; he wants us to ask the hard questions.

And, as is his habit, he doesn't give us any easy answers; he challenges us to figure things out for ourselves.

That brings us to the second part of this reveal.

Having identified “*love the Lord*” as the greatest of all commandments, Jesus next probes the term “**Lord;**” who is the object of this love?

“*As long as you’re here,*” Jesus says, “*whose son is the Messiah?*”

Well. The Pharisees are the most learned guys around; surely, they know the right answer.

So, they take the bait: “*David’s, of course!*” they say with confidence.

Well, Jesus has something up his sleeve and reminds them that David named the Messiah “*Lord*” in Psalm 110; *they should have known this!*

Jesus can’t help but wonder aloud how David could call his own son “*Lord.*”

It doesn’t make sense; it goes against the entire patriarchal tradition of Hebrew culture.

The Pharisees need some time to process this.

It sounds like Jesus is expanding the definition of “**Messiah**” and they are stumped.

That's why this reminded me – *a little bit* – of that scene in the movie, **A Few Good Men** when Jack Nicholson shouts, “*You can't handle the truth!*”

I wonder if that is why, “*from that day, no one dared to ask him any more questions.*”

Maybe they were beginning to understand that they didn't know how to handle the truth Jesus brought.

We can debate the motives of the Pharisees all day long and speculate about how these confrontations really played out, but I'm not sure that matters today.

It seems like the Pharisees spent a lot of time looking for ways to discredit Jesus.

In fact, they spent a lot of time trying to put down *anyone* who questioned their authority or threatened their power over the people.

Today's text is just one more example of how they tried to set Jesus up to fail when they asked “loaded” questions.

The bigger issue for us is whether we can handle the truth of Jesus.

The rabbinic tradition in Judaism is rooted in the idea that there is room for debate when interpreting the Hebrew Bible (our “*Old Testament*”).

This gave rise to the various sects we read about; the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Zealots were the most prominent.

These sects were divided over their interpretation of Scripture; they were united in their distrust of Jesus.

Jesus comes into this “*love the Lord your God*” commandment and makes an extraordinary assertion.

It shuts down their questioning because they are not accustomed to hearing “*absolute truth*”; they have always been able to debate “truth”.

I think we may have the same problem in our culture today; people believe less and less in absolute truth and lean toward relativism.

Maybe we just can't handle the truth that Jesus really is God manifest as a human who came to set an example for how we should be living our lives.

Maybe we just don't want to listen to the truth that there really are some rules that should never be broken: loving God, loving others, and caring for one another are absolutes, not suggestions.

Since the beginning of Creation, God has tried to show us that following God's absolute truth leads to hope.

God's Law was not given to oppress or punish us; it is offered as a way to live with one another that respects our differences and embraces our commonalities.

The idea that loving God and loving others may lead to the transformation of the world is **not** a negative thing.

The Big Reveal here is that Jesus truly **is** the Son of God sent to guide us toward the world that God dreamed of at the dawn of time.

We may be able to debate a lot of things; the truth of Jesus is not one of those.



We call Jesus “*Lord*” because he **is** – God,  
Almighty, Incarnate, and Indivisible.

When Jesus speaks in this text today, we can recall  
the voice from heaven we heard a few chapters  
back: “*This is my Son...Listen to Him!*”.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**