



“What Are We Commanded?”

Pastor Andy CastroLang

November 4, 2018

Scripture (NRSV):

Psalm 146

¹ Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!

² I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

³ Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.

⁴ When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.

⁵ Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God,

⁶ who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;

⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;

⁸ the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;

the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹ The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow,

but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰ The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

Mark 12:28-31

²⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard the Sadducees disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ 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.’ ³¹ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Sermon:

It has been said that you can find justification for almost anything in the Bible. Holy war, for instance, as one local politician is exploring, these days.

Slavery, treating women as objects, capital punishment...yup, there is that in the Bible. Understanding a famous book that is also so old, so contextually diverse, so culturally diverse, so stuffed with literary forms and languages that are hard for us to grasp...this makes the Bible worthy of study. Serious study. And it begs us to take care as we read and as we study, so that we don't act proudly or presumptuously, misinterpreting or demanding of the Bible something that the Bible cannot give us.

We who read and study Scripture often pick out our "favorite" stories or parables or quotes...often. Some may sneer and call it "cherry picking" as if that is not allowed. But we often have a text that has proven significant in our life, (for years, my favorite text was "the woman bent over" in the gospel of Luke; as I struggled to be fully accepted and fully alive as a person with a vocation, and my desire to be a pastor) or we have a favorite book of the Bible (I have always loved the Song of Songs!), and sometimes we use these texts to defend our perspective, our morality, our laws even.

Jesus does it, in the gospel of Mark, today.

In few words, and with total directness, he tells the scribe what he deems most important: Love God first, and with all of oneself; heart, mind, soul and strength. And love one's neighbor as oneself. Found in the book of Leviticus 19:18

This is everything for Jesus.

It was in fact the teaching of Rabbi Hillel, one of the greatest Jewish teachers of the time, saying that all the rest of the teaching and law was "commentary" on the great commandment.

It isn't complicated. But it isn't easy.

Yet clearly this is our work. Jesus says so.

And the psalmist, too, really. In rapturous poetry, the psalmist still ends up saying what Jesus says, what Leviticus 19 says.

Extolling the glory of God, the virtue of God, and then, God's relation to us, which we are to model in our own lives through love of neighbor and love of God. We have the words of the psalmist, who extolls God: "who keeps faith forever; ⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; ⁸ the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. ⁹ The Lord watches over the strangers; the Lord upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked the Lord brings to ruin."

Here is the work of Westminster then. To love God, and love neighbor. Our well-known neighbors, and the other neighbors, too: the stranger, the orphan, the widow, the bowed down, the prisoner, the hungry, the people at the border, the people across the street, the people two doors down.

This is our mission here. This is what we try to do here. With our time, our money, our building. This is what we are passionate about, in a lot of different ways!

Randy and Karen, and representatives of many of our working members of Westminster, will now be sharing how we spend our time and money on this, the work that Jesus calls us to, the mission of good news that we strive to share with friend and neighbor, with our wider family in church and beyond it, and for our city, and the world!

[At this point, there were brief introductions of the various working groups of the church; for education to adult's children and youth, for service and charity, for our community organizing, for our worship, our group of friendly deacons, our dedicated and hardworking trustees. They all mentioned what sort of work they did, how they organized themselves, what they saw as their purpose and their passion. They invited others to join them and there were some new volunteers who showed interest!]