

22 Pentecost
October 29, 2023

Sermon by Clerene Romeo

Heavenly Father please open our hearts and minds to your word.

Please be seated.

In the reading from the book of Leviticus, God is speaking to Moses. Moses is the prophet who received the 10 commandments that was given to him by God. God instructed Moses to inform the congregation how to conduct themselves. They are to be Holy, meaning that they are to be set apart from others and not be involved in the mistreatment of others- because the God they serve is Holy.

The message is repeated in the Psalm.

In the book of Psalms, the very first Psalm- Psalm 1 the very first stanza reads

Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, *
nor lingered in the way of sinners,
nor sat in the seats of the scornful!

How can we incorporate these teachings continuously in our daily lives?

Let's see if the reading from 1 Thessalonians would provide some answers:

Paul the Apostle speaks to the people of Thessalonica. He speaks with confidence, letting the people know that his visit, while not motivated by fame, greed, or trickery, was going to produce results. Paul gains their attention when he informs them that his visit was not on his accord by the approval of God with the message of the gospel. Paul spoke gently God's truth, with love and respect to the Thessalonians. His message was not to please men but to please God. Paul's treatment was generosity and grace.

We may not always be welcomed when spreading the good news.

So, we visit Jesus' way:

Last week we heard the reading where the Pharisees - trying to trick Jesus into choosing whether the people should pay taxes to either the Emperor or God and Jesus's response was "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." When they heard this, they were amazed, and they left him and went away.

We just never learn – I can no longer say they just never learn, because we all do fall into the same predicament over and over. WE just never learn... or tend to suffer from amnesia or short-term memory.

Today we see that the Pharisees did not give up. They believed that they were able to accomplish what others were not able to do: which is trying to trick Jesus.

The lawyer an expert in the law addressed Jesus as Master, which means Rabbi, teacher, or Lord. Knowing that Jesus is a teacher and Lord, the lawyer thinks that he is capable of outsmarting Jesus. Talk about a big ego! Or was calling Jesus “Master” a sign of mockery, lack of respect.

The question that the lawyer asked was “Master which is the greatest of the 10 commandments?” A limited question. Jesus’ response was “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Jesus was not limited to the lawyer’s request for one, but made certain He presented the commandments that He, Jesus, thought was the greatest. Jesus affirmed that it was important to love your neighbors. Love does not stop with God and self. It flows with the same importance to our neighbors.

Jesus’ response left them speechless. He turned to scripture –when he asked the Pharisees “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son, is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet”’?

By no means am I suggesting we get that deep in a debate or discussion. But there is confidence in the knowledge of knowing scripture.

Jesus read scripture, He studied the scriptures, He taught the scripture, prayed on it, believed it, and used it.

WE are all called to do likewise.

The Pharisees were trying their hardest to draw Jesus into their entanglement, but Jesus rose above it all- with His response that closed the door for any further questions.

Were they not willing to love their neighbors?

Where are we in our scripture reading and prayer life. What is our defense mechanism – what can we say in LOVE to others when we fare tested?

I recall a parking lot incident that took place on a windy March Day in Maryland. As I opened my car door, the wind took control of the door and hit the car next to mine. The owner of that car was standing there enjoying a cigarette and angrily said a few things, examined her car and said,

“lucky for you there is not a dent.” This must have been one of my better days as I responded, “Have a blessed day.” Either she did not hear me or was not used to kind words and asked, “What did you say?” I repeated myself and said have a blessed day, and she just looked at me, and softly said “OH!” But her whole expression had softened.

Now, that took place over 20 years ago. Hard to believe since I do not look much older than that. 😊

We are living in some trying times. When we are not even given an opportunity to respond with Love, what is your go to?

To be able to address anyone the way Jesus does requires both courage and confidence. How Jesus took advantage of this opportunity to flip the coin on the Pharisees when he asked the question regarding David. Per the reading, no one was able to give the answer and from that day no one dared to ask Jesus any questions.

Jesus is our example and we were left with a promise that we can do great things. Per John 14:12

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

Jesus exercised courage when confronted by the those trying to trick Him, to the point of leaving them speechless. Paul exercised great courage and determination to spread the Good News even while in prison. He did not give up but continued writing letters to churches encouraging them to stand strong and how to respect and treat each other with love.

So let us do likewise, let us open the Good News, read, study, meditate, and pray. Learn to grow in the ways of loving God, our neighbors, and ourselves through the heaviness of the news today: the wars in Ukraine, Gaza and Israel, mass shooting in Maine, and sudden or serious illnesses of those near to our hearts. Let’s not be despondent but develop that bold attitude. Every morning let us make a conscious effort to TURN- turn our attentions to the one who created us, who first loved us, that we may do likewise and love all! And when you do not have the strength to do so, just Pray for the courage to open our hearts and love!!

Let us pray:

Oh, heavenly father we give you thanks for our time together that we may continue to grow into the people you created us to be, to love you Lord and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are grateful that you know our needs, so we thank you for the Vicar you have chosen for us, the healing of the Diocese, the healing of those on our prayer list and for hearts overflowing with love.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen!