

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

***Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17; 1Thessalonians 2:1-8;
Matthew 22:34-46***

Do we love God with our whole heart and all of our soul and mind? Do we love our neighbor in the same way? These are the tough questions of today's readings. Loving God is not measured simply by being baptized, going to church, praying regularly, or by professing to be a Christian. Loving God completely is born out of loving God through our love of all that is God in His entire creation.

For Moses and the Israelites, loving God as much as He proved He loved them, was a challenge. God's love delivered them from the oppression of slavery in Egypt. God never intended any of His creation to be oppressors, or to be oppressed. That is why God gave them so many opportunities to get it right.

Moses led the people from slavery and saw God in a unique way. God followed through with the promise made to the Israelites and at the end of Moses' life they stood together looking out over the "promised land." Moses died knowing that they had arrived and that God had provided them with the Torah, so that they could continue to live the way God had taught them through Moses, who had spent his life doing God's work and learning what it meant to love God and everything of God.

God's love is also evident in, what is believed to be the earliest Christian writing, Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians. Paul acknowledges that it takes courage to proclaim the Gospel in the face of opposition. Paul does not simply accept his commission and obligation to share the Gospel, but to do it with the

gentleness of a nursemaid. How might we respond if someone would tell us that they care for us so deeply that they are determined to share, not only the Gospel of God, but all of themselves?

The officials in the Gospel of Matthew are thinking very narrowly when they ask Jesus to identify just one of the more than 614 Jewish Laws as more important than the others. Their idea of what Torah meant, did not include the point of view Jesus gave them. When they asked Jesus to tell them which commandment was most important, Jesus answered with what seems like a broader meaning: “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.”

In His response to the officials, Jesus gave us a marvellous pattern for our lives, as His faithful followers. He makes it clear that we must love God with every part of us, and every part of us must love all that God loves. This is the example that Jesus modelled that for us in his life. He loved God even when it meant that he would know suffering and death. Jesus loved even those people that we might be inclined to judge. The question for us is, can we do the same. We have to ask ourselves if the readings we have heard today, seem unrelated to our lives, or if we can see our own lives in them.

At first glance, the world we live in might seem to be different than the Old or New Testament worlds, but is it really? We cannot deny the context of the Old Testament story. We read about the oppression of the Israelites and their journey to freedom, but do we consider who is being oppressed today?

Even more difficult, is asking ourselves if we are oppressors or,

more importantly, if we treat every person justly. How do we love God when we are not acting justly? These are difficult questions. And we have to ask ourselves if we are living justly and loving God with our whole heart, soul and mind.

But, what does it mean to love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind? Since all relationships touch our hearts, soul, or mind, we would have to say that this means that every part of us needs to love God. And if the second commandment is like the first, we are expected to love all relationships as we love God.

Jesus is not qualifying these relationships to mean only the people we want to love. Jesus is describing all things in all of creation. And, it goes one step further, because Jesus also tells us that we cannot love God if we do not love all that God made in creation. This is what he meant by “the second is like the first,” and that is what is most difficult about the Gospel reading today, because of the nature of the world in which we live.

Our world is being destroyed by greed and the pursuit of power.

We live in a world that turns its head as the rainforests burn away and glaciers melt away; a world where many would rather drive gas guzzling vehicles that are consuming the world’s oil supply faster than we can produce it. Accordingly, the world answers the needs for more fuel by destroying more and more of God’s creation. With these facts, how do we reconcile our love for God with our whole hearts, souls, and minds?

Also, how do we reconcile ourselves to loving God with all that we are, when we so willingly go to church and then partake in drinking coffee from Styrofoam and paper cups that litter the sides of our streets and highways? How does it make sense for us to be more interested in loving the things that we buy with our money, while ignoring the people in our communities and

our world, who need our help? How are we loving God with all that we are, when we choose to separate ourselves from others using God's own words as our defence?

Every day God gives us many opportunities to get right with Him. Every day when the sun rises, we can either take it for granted, or thank God for another day, acknowledging the miracle of each new day. Every day of our life we are interacting with the world around us. Are we loving all our world with all that we are, our hearts, our minds, and our souls? It is not about merely proving that we get it, and love God and our neighbour, is about showing that we get it and love God and our neighbour with all of our hearts, souls, and minds.

AMEN.