

## 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT A

**“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

These, Jesus says, are the two commandments on which everything else hangs. They are two sides of the same thing. You cannot truly have one without the other. This is about more than our feelings or affection for God and one another. It is about our commitment to the life and well-being of others. It is a choice we make every day – to love or not to love.

I wonder what that love looks like. I wonder what your life and my life would be like if we held those two commandments as the guiding principles for all we do. I wonder what we might create and achieve if we embodied and lived those commandments.

Here is another way of getting at what I am asking. What kind of world do you want to live in? What kind of world do you want for your children, grandchildren, and those who will come after you? What are your best wishes and hopes for the world's future, our country, and this city? What do you pray for, when you look at everything that is happening today?

Here are some of the things I want, wish, and pray for. I want a world that is founded on human dignity and respect for one another. I want a world in which people come first, a world in which principles and

policies support people rather than agendas. I want justice for all and not just those who can afford it, or who have power.

I want a world in which different religions and beliefs are valued and viewed as a means for all to meet the Divine. I want a world in which diversity and difference are celebrated rather than oppressed, a world in which people and nations are at peace with themselves and one another. I want a world in which we face and learn from our past, mistakes, and failures so that we can do and be better.

I want a world in which everyone has living wage employment, educational opportunities, access to healthcare, safe and decent housing; enough to eat. I want a world in which the first, maybe even the only, judgment we make is that the needs, concerns, sorrows, hopes, dreams, and lives of others matter as much as our own.

Don't you want those same things too? Isn't that the kind of world you want to live in and pass on to the next generation? What else would you add to my list?

Ultimately, that list points to a world in which we love God, and our neighbor as ourselves. We say that's what we want, but is it? Do we believe those are the two commandments on which everything else hangs? Are they really what orients the direction of our hearts and determines the things to which we give our time, money, and energy?

I want to say yes to those questions, but I am just not so sure anymore. I look at what's happening in our country today and I am not

sure we fully believe or live those two commandments. If we did, wouldn't our world be different?

**“You shall love the Lord, your God,”** Jesus says. Yes, but what is it that I love when I say I love God? Have you ever thought about that? I cannot help but wonder if nationalism, individual rights, and self-interest have displaced God as our first love. If God was our first love wouldn't God's concerns, dreams, and hopes for the world be ours too? A wise man once told me, **“We love others best when we love God first and most.”**

**“You shall love your neighbor as yourself,”** Jesus says. Yes, it is a value I claim to hold in my life. It is something I teach and preach. And yet, I don't even know the names of the people who live across the street or two houses down from mine. How could I possibly know their hurts, hopes, or needs? What about you? How do you love your neighbor?

One of the things I know about myself, and maybe this is true for you too, is that I can always find the time, money, and energy for the things that matter to me. And regardless of how much I have, I will never have enough time, money, and energy for the things that don't matter to me. I hope you know that I am not talking about the quantity of my hours or dollars, but the quality and shape of my commitments.

When I look at my wish list and listen to my prayers for the world, I must ask myself, **“What am I doing to bring that world into**

**existence?”** What are you doing? It is not enough to only want, wish, or pray for that world. Love is a verb, an action.

I am afraid those two great commandments have become like an old favorite song. The tune has been so overplayed that it no longer calls us to the dance floor. The words are so familiar that we no longer hear them. We have lost our passion for music. We still like the song, but we are no longer singing it, and if we are, it is only for the God who comforts, affirms, and comes through for us; only for the neighbor who looks, acts, thinks, worships, and votes like us.

I don't know what that is but that's not love. The love Jesus speaks about is all or nothing. We love God first or not at all. We love everyone or no one. **“The only measure of love is love without measure.”**

What if you asked someone, **“Do you love me?”** After a long and awkward pause and considerable deliberation he or she said, **“Well, up to a certain point, under certain conditions, to a certain extent, yes, I do.”** You have your answer, and it is not what you wanted to hear. We all know that's not love.

**“The mark of really loving someone or something is unconditionality and excess, engagement and commitment, fire, and passion.”**

Where is that today in your life, my life, and the life of our country and this city? Who is the recipient of that love and who is not? And what

would it take for you and me to expand the circle of our loving? Do we even want to?

I struggled with today's gospel. It would have been so much easier, and certainly less risky, to preach a sentimental, feel-good, great kind of sermon. But that would have been a betrayal of Jesus, you, and me. So, you got what you got.

**My Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you were asking, "**So what is the hope in this sermon?**" And you would be right to ask that question. I asked myself that exact question. And here is my answer: You are, I am.

You and I are the hope that runs throughout this sermon. You and I are the hope of the next generation. You and I are the hope for our country and this city. You and I are love's only hope in this world. **Amen.**