

According to Jesus, the greatest commandment, the first among over 600 commandments is the Shema found in Deuteronomy 6:4&5. I'm going to read it again, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." That's number one! It is so important, that many men wrote it down; put it in a little box and wore it on their foreheads during morning prayers. Orthodox Jews still do it today.

The second greatest law is from Leviticus 19:18, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." You know it is serious when the sentence ends with "I am the LORD."

When you look at today's gospel reading, we need to remember that, unlike in other gospel passages the scribes and pharisees are looked down upon for trying to trip Jesus up. But that is not what is happening here. The scribe is being serious in his discussion with Jesus. The two agree with one another in their interpretation of the scriptures. The scribe even says, "this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

What does it mean then to love God and love your neighbor?... It's easy right? Give money to charities, help people and be nice to people. Simple.... But is it really? If it was easy it probably wouldn't need to be a commandment.

It seems to me that if we truly love our Creator, then loving others who are made in the Creator's image would be a prerequisite. Being a part of the kingdom of heaven goes beyond a relationship with Jesus. It requires taking part in the struggles for justice and wholeness for one's neighbors, or even one's enemies.

Looking again at Leviticus, the first half of the sentence says, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people,..." It's starting to get a little complicated now, isn't it?!? Loving God is more of a one-to-one relationship, but the loving of God's children is more of a social inter-relationship. And that provides an ongoing challenge, doesn't it, because your neighbor might also be your enemy or the social outcast; or the vulnerable.

We tend to think of love in sentimental terms, but 20<sup>th</sup> Century theologian, Paul Tillich, believed that love moves one to unify that which has been divided or

estranged. Love entails all of the qualities found in verse 30 of today's gospel reading, with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Theological Professor, Christophe D. Ringer believes "The commandment to love one's enemies or those who are socially outcast is not a request for something to be done. Rather, it reveals the personal transgression already experienced, the cultural fabric that segregates, and the political power that dominates."

Brothers and sister, during the last few weeks the dark sickness of systemic racism in America has been exposed by the healing light of the Holy One. Sadly, we have ignored this disease for too long to the point where we have come to accept it as normal. It is not normal! It is not normal! It is a sin! It has caused America to ignore its call to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.

Systemic Racism is not normal. It is ungodly and goes against the commandments of love. If we are to stand in the Light of Love then we must fight the injustices that our way of life has perpetuated against our brothers and sisters of color.

Carol L. Wade of the Christ Church Cathedral in Lexington, Kentucky reminds us that "Knowledge of God's love brings us close to the kingdom, but to enter the kingdom requires something more. Loving God entails loving others and upholding justice and dignity for all. Following Jesus means sharing in his passion for living the kingdom in concrete ways that challenge the status quo. This is what the protesters are doing. Not the rioting; not the destruction of property! That is a darkness perpetrated by people taking advantage of the situation. That is the enemy trying to divide and interfere with the kingdom of heaven being built on earth. We cannot let that evil distract us from battling the systemic evil.

What do I mean by systemic evil? I mean the system that gives white people like me (and perhaps you) advantages over people of color because of the way our society was created. For a better understanding of this I urge you to visit our website's Sunday Morning Sermons page and watch the video "Deconstructing White Privilege" by Dr. Robin DiAngelo.

Brothers and sisters, when we take part in building the kingdom of heaven, we are transforming the world into the one God had envisioned for us. Reverend

Wade reminds us that God's reign is manifested by saying prayers at a hospital, helping someone search for a new job, equipping young people to live out a social justice ministry or bringing dinner to a grieving friend. By doing these things we choose to be one with and for God and help alleviate suffering and redeem injustice. But the good news is that God is there right beside us. The reign of Holiness isn't reliant upon us, but on God's love, taking root deep with our souls – for it is by love made real that we know Christ and can then enter the kingdom.

May the work we do in battling darkness in this world be holy, pleasing to, and blessed by the Spirit of God. Amen.