

**First Presbyterian Church  
Independence, MO  
October 29, 2017**

*“Interconnected Love”*

**Matthew 22:34-40**

*34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, 35 and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 37 He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*

I grew up in Nebraska. Then, in 2008 I decided to make a drastic change in my life. I moved to Georgia to start my first real job. I was introduced to a very strange breed of people; eating grits and deep frying everything in sight. But they were very welcoming and took me in ever so graciously. In 2011, I started attending Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA where my soul intention was to study. Yet, God had other plans for me and I met my husband. After only 3 months of my dating Will, my husband, I was invited to attend his sister’s wedding in south Mississippi. When I arrived, I saw a conglomeration of people. You see, Will’s family is what I would call a small United Nations. His mother’s side is Italian and Puerto Rican and his father’s side is Southern. His sister, Nicole, was marrying an Indian, one from India. Needless to say, a very interesting mix of people. When I officially met Will’s family, they loved me immediately, even though I am a small town, mid-western girl. And I loved them as well.

This morning, we heard in our scripture a conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees. But before we get too far, let me take a moment to set up the scene. A couple of chapters before, we hear the familiar story of Jesus riding in on a donkey into town with everyone waving palm branches and shouting, “Hosanna in the Highest,” or Palm Sunday (have the congregation respond to this). About 3 chapters, Jesus will be in the midst of the Last Supper. We are in the last days of Jesus’ life. Even though this is going on, Jesus is still trying to teach God’s love to those around him, even to those who are against His teachings.

Right before our scripture this morning, the Sadducees asked Jesus a question about resurrection and how marriage will work according to how they viewed the law, to which he quickly quieted them down.

This is what the Pharisees were excited about, not because they agreed with the answer. You see, the Sadducees were the religious enemies of the Pharisees. So, the Pharisees took this as an opportunity to challenge Jesus on the law. The law that we are talking is the Law of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. In fact, they are called the Torah, which means "law." In the 3<sup>rd</sup> book, Leviticus, there are 613 different laws; 365 negative laws (thou shall not...) and 248 positive laws (thou shall do...). The Pharisees, and any good Hebrew knew these laws, including Jesus.

But it was a lawyer, an expert in the law who was testing Jesus. It's just like our lawyers today who know our judicial system. The lawyer in our passage this morning was not asking Jesus a question to see how well he knew the law; to see if he could pass the test with flying colors, but rather to try to capture Jesus in saying something that would get him into trouble.

So, when the lawyer asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was he was not expecting the answer Jesus gave him. Not only could he find no fault in the answer, but he was only looking for a single commandment, but got 2 commandments instead. Let's take a look at the 2 commandments. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Hebrew's at the time believed that the heart and mind were linked together and was the center of all life.

The soul was literally who you were. We heard this commandment back in Deuteronomy as well in our first passage. It states, in order to love God, one has to do it with all that you are and have, not just be saying that you love God. It needs to be a love that is coming from deep within you. It needs to be your way of life.

Jesus continues and says, "A second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The word "like" is important. It's not saying that the two commandments are similar as if I was comparing 2 things by saying, 'I am as nutty as a fruitcake' or Chevy's motto, 'built like a rock.' But rather, "like" in the way Jesus is saying talking about is that the 2 commandments are at the same level theologically. You cannot have one without the other, they are interconnected.

In other words, if you love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, then, you must also love your neighbor as yourself. And vice versa, if you love your neighbor as yourself, then you must love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. What Jesus is attempting to explain to these Pharisees, and us, is that we are called to love each other through, and because of our differences. We are to love as God loves us. Each of us. Not just the ones that we want.

Will's family took me in and has loved me immensely. And let's face it, I'm a little different. Will's brother-in-law, Abhay is different. First, even though he is of Indian descent, he grew up in south Mississippi and has a southern accent. I'm still not used to it. Second, he has had macular degeneration since elementary school. It doesn't matter to us, we all love and care for each other. Now, although it is easy for me, not everyone is lucky enough to have family that gets along with each other. But, we are called to love more than our family. Our neighbors are more than just those we want to be around.

Our neighbors are also those that look different than us, sound different than us, act different than us, who drive us incredibly insane, who smells because they haven't had a chance to shower in the last 5 days or are wearing the same outfit because it's the only one they own.

The Pharisees were called to love the Sadducees. We are called to love those people just like God love us, unconditionally and without any reservation. This can be something that is as simple as listening to someone or giving someone a meal or to say hi or give someone a hug. To pay attention to someone who we would normally just pass right by.

Let me leave you with one final thought. Just a couple chapters later in Matthew, shortly before the Last Supper, specifically Matthew 25:40, Jesus is again talking to a group of people saying, "Truly I tell you just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." We are all members of the family of Jesus, so when you do good things and bad, you are also doing those things to Jesus.