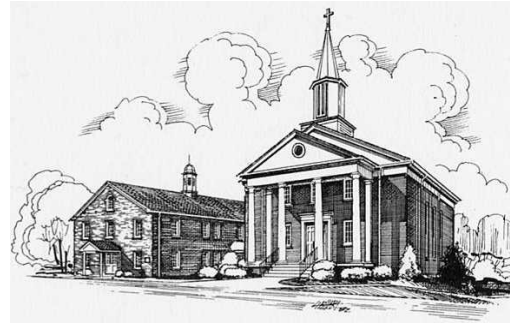


## Sunday closest to November 2

Proper 26

Year B

RCL



Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Psalm 119:1-8

Mark 12:28-34

### The Collect

Almighty and merciful God, it is only by your gift that your faithful people offer you true and laudable service: Grant that we may run without stumbling to obtain your heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

**Deuteronomy 6:1-9**

Moses said: Now this is the commandment – the statutes and the ordinances – that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children's children, may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

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. Keep

these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Psalm 119:1-8

***Beati immaculati***

- 1 Happy are they whose way is blameless, \*  
who walk in the law of the LORD!
- 2 Happy are they who observe his decrees \*  
and seek him with all their hearts!
- 3 Who never do any wrong, \*  
but always walk in his ways.
- 4 You laid down your commandments, \*  
that we should fully keep them.
- 5 Oh, that my ways were made so direct \*  
that I might keep your statutes!
- 6 Then I should not be put to shame, \*  
when I regard all your commandments.
- 7 I will thank you with an unfeigned heart, \*  
when I have learned your righteous judgments.
- 8 I will keep your statutes; \*  
do not utterly forsake me.

Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came near and heard the Saducees disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ —this is much more important than all whole

burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

## SERMON

Every last time I entered into public service during my career as a policeman and a prosecutor, I was required to hold up my right hand (thus demonstrating that I was not holding a weapon) and swear that I had not engaged in a duel with deadly weapons. That was a condition of my employment – that I had not engaged in a duel with deadly weapons. Whatever my other strengths or weaknesses, at the very least I hadn't gotten into a duel. I'm sure everyone in the room issued a sigh of relief to hear that.

At its best, the law accomplishes something valuable to the community by discouraging behavior harmful to the community and encouraging helpful behavior. That's the essence of the law.

**We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are en-**

**dowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men**

Hear that last bit. That to secure these rights, we establish governments to make laws to protect these unalienable rights. Law, to be just, must accomplish a good for the community. That is its essence. When law departs from its essence, as with that silly oath, it becomes a purposeless tyrant. For evidence, look no further than the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first significant law restricting immigration into the United States. Those on the West Coast were especially prone to attribute declining wages and economic ills on the despised Chinese workers. Congress passed the exclusion act to placate worker demands and assuage prevalent concerns about maintaining white “racial purity.”



Laws which depart from the reason for their existence, their essence, encourage us to treat even beneficial laws with contempt. True story: in the 1930's Ashland passed a law forbidding the showing of movies on Sunday. Law or no law, a good number of people wanted to see a movie on Sunday. Afternoon, you understand. After church. Each Sunday, my grandfather and my mother would open the Capitol theater. Granddad sold tickets while mom looked after the concession stand. Directly, the police arrived to arrest Granddad and drive him to the county judge's house while mom continued to sell tickets. After Granddad paid his fine, the police drove him back to the Capitol, mom moved back to concessions and all was well, nudge, nudge, wink, wink. The law had been honored (however perfunctorily) the desire of the audience had been seen to and Granddad made a little money but at the cost of

making the law a laughingstock. That's not a good thing. Any actions we take which treat the law with disrespect harm us all. Unfortunately for us, we're a stubborn lot. We're the land of the free and the home of the brave. We don't like to be told what to do, so we view the law as something to be gotten around, just as Granddad did. There's a billboard on Winchester, an advertisement for a lawyer, which says "Just because you did it doesn't make you guilty". After 25 years as a felony prosecutor, I can tell you that there is no end of good reasons people seize upon to defend the doing of bad things.

So, let's look at our passages for today – passages of critical importance. Moses tells the people:

Now this is the commandment – the statutes and the ordinances – that the LORD your God charged

me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children's children, may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.

As we said, the essence of law is to accomplish a worthy goal. Moses is about to give the law given to him by God “so that you and your children and your children's children, may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.” What Moses is about to give them is not the Ten Commandments, nor the 613 mitzvot that Maimonides would later count. He is about to give them the irreducible essence and soul of the law, something so holy that Jews are to recite it morning and evening, and hope to recite it on their deathbed. It is the

great Jewish prayer, the Shema, which begins:

Sh'ma Yisrael  
Hear, oh Israel

Adonai Eloheinu  
The Lord is our God

Adonai Echad  
The Lord is one

And continues:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

I've made a big deal of the Shema because it IS a big deal. This was the point of the scribe's question to Jesus. Is this strange young teacher grounded in Torah, or is he not?

One of the scribes came near and heard the Sadducees disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, "Which

commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Does he know what he is speaking of? He does. He is speaking from the essence of God’s law.

Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Many people think of Judaism as the religion of cold, harsh laws, to be contrasted with Christianity, the religion of love and brotherhood. This is an unfair characterization. Love and kindness have been a part of Ju-

daism from the very beginning. When Jesus said, “love thy neighbor as thyself,” he was merely quoting Torah, and he was quoting the book that is most commonly dismissed as a source of harsh laws: Leviticus. Significantly for our time, the point is repeated in Leviticus 19:34.<sup>1</sup>

The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

Rabbi Hillel, who lived about the same time as Jesus, was approached by a pagan who challenged him saying that he would convert to Judaism if Hillel could teach him the whole of the Torah in the time he could stand on one foot. Rabbi Hillel replied, “What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your fellow man. That is the whole Torah; the rest is just commentary. Go and study it.”<sup>2</sup>

1 <http://www.jewfaq.org/brother.htm>

2 Talmud Shabbat 31a

You don't have to ride this old rock around the sun many times before you come across people embracing the name of Christ, people who show up in church every Sunday, who work around the church and give generously, but who hold hateful ideas about people different from themselves. The commandments are the tools the law uses to implement the essence of the law, and the essence of the law, the reason there are churches and Bible study groups, and communities of worship is this:

Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

There is no point to learning all there is to know about a hoe if you never bring forth a harvest.

AMEN

## BENEDICTION

What is the essence of the law?

Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

I was searching prayerfully for a benediction for you when I seemed to see a vast desert and a very thirsty man wandering in it, near death from lack of water. Just beyond a rise, he saw a pump! He hurried to its saving waters and found just what he desperately needed – a bottle of water, but there was also a note warning that:

You got to prime the pump, you must have faith and believe.

You have to give of yourself before you're ready to receive.

Drink all the water you can hold, wash your face,



cool your feet

But leave the bottle full for others, thank you kindly,  
desert Pete.

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gra-  
cious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you  
peace.

---

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square  
brackets.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and  
Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Ver-  
sion Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian  
Education of the National Council of the Church of  
Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book  
of Common Prayer, 1979.

Sermon Copyright 2018 J. Stewart Schneider