

Proper 25 Year A
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
October 25, 2020

Deuteronomy 34:1-12 Psalm 90: 1-6, 13-17 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8
Matthew 22:34-40

Halakhah

The commandments in the Torah, Torah being the first five books of the bible, number 613. These 613 commandments are called the” *halakhah*,” and mean the way to walk, the path. *Halakhah* comes from the book of Deuteronomy, “you shall walk in God’s ways.” Deuteronomy 5:33:

“You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess.”

Halakhah is not about following or breaking laws that might lead to jail time, but about our relationship with God and keeping our lives on the path of God, with God guiding our steps. There is the sense that God commanded: “do this because I love you.” An engaged relationship with God is shown in the path and the way in which we walk every single day.

In our deeply flawed humanity we ask: which commandment (law) is the most important? What is the one that I need to know to pass the test – to find favor with God – to get into heaven – to avoid eternal punishment? Which commandment, dear Jesus, is on test?

This question is from a first century lawyer and is asked during Jesus’ final trip into Jerusalem. We are one week away from Jesus’ crucifixion. Imagine the tension between Jesus and the authorities. Will Jesus violate Torah in his answer? For us, does Jesus walk in the path of God’s ways?

Jesus responds with tools of ancient Judaism, the commandments themselves. First, he quotes the Shema from Deuteronomy Chapter 6: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is 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 might.” Moses said these same words in his farewell discourse. Hear how beautiful – and how important they are:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶ Keep these words that I am commanding you

today in your heart. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem^[b] on your forehead, ⁹ and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Keep these words – and subsequent actions – around you all the time – everywhere! Keep, recite, bind, fix, write them. Follow this path because God loves you.

Jesus goes on to say that there is a second commandment – to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Here, Jesus paraphrases Leviticus 19: “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.”

Two commandments alone are the test: “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Jesus summarizes all of what God commands in the Torah – the known bible of the in these two commandments. Live on this path every day. If we work fully on our relationship with God, and then treat others as we treat ourselves, we are pulling everyone into who we are. As God is one, so are we: one creation, one purpose, one community: God’s beloved. Loving God and loving our neighbor must exist together. We cannot love God and hate the person next door without pulling ourselves off the path of God, because God’s love is for the whole of God’s creation.

The Rev. Todd Weir writes:

Whenever you get lost in the labyrinth of complex moral issues, frustrations, deep questions, [a pandemic], the Great Commandment is where you return to find yourself again. It grounds us again in the deep oneness of God’s love permeating our being. And we need to do practice it daily, reminding ourselves as we rise and as we go to sleep.

We need God’s grounding today. Today as in Sunday, today as in during an uncompromising pandemic, today as in one week and a few days before what is sure to be a contentious election. We are to ground ourselves in the loving path of God. (Tell the story about the woman in NY needing a priest one day -)

We are going to need to be grounded one day, and that day is today and yesterday and forever. The path of God is a daily relationship, maybe even an hourly one. We are reminded and made whole by living into the reality that it is in God that we

live and move and have our being. Even now. Especially now, so that we know the deep oneness of God.

This oneness of God and with God means that we do not disparage others. We do not berate someone for who they are: for their race, gender, sexual orientation, wealth, poverty, or for the way that they vote.

Next week, on All Saints Day, we remember all who have died. At the same time, we enter into new life in Christ as we witness the baptism of Kyle German and promise again to turn from evil and turn TO Jesus Christ. What will our daily new life show ourselves and others who we are?

Like Moses before us, we stand on the threshold of the Promised Land. We enter it with the path that we follow. Hear Paul's words to the people of Thessalonica:

"So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us."

Now imagine: so deeply do we tend our relationship with God that we share that path with everyone we encounter, because all of God's creation is very dear to us.