

Faith in two Dimensions

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Jesus said to the Lawyer, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘*You shall love your neighbour as yourself.*’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

We hear These words each week, but how often do we get beyond the familiarity and think about the meaning? They are the questions that each parent and godparent is asked in the Baptism service, to which they reply, "I will with God's help". They are, if you like, the essence of what it is to be a Christian. Faith is expressed in a two-dimensional framework with reference to God and with reference to our neighbours. In these words, Jesus redefines the Ten Commandments into the elements and, in re-expressing them, rebuilds them into an expression of love. Favourable terms that reinvigorate the ***Thou Shalt Nots*** into an active faith, a wilful faith.

God has commanded you to love - this is what it means to be the image of God, not that we think, but that we can love another in that highest form of love that gives, not gets. *God so loved the world that he gave his only son.* God so loved me (or you or you or you) that he gave his only son. Love is expressed in giving, not a warm fuzzy feeling, not the satisfaction of craving or the expression of affection, but the unlimited uninhibited giving of oneself for the other. It is not what I would do to win one's affection but what I would do for the betterment of the other.

I fear about defining love for our coming generation because so much of what is described as love in our modern world cheapens the demand of God. We take lust and call it love; we portray it as a feeling, not a will or an action. We are in love or make love, but what God wants is that we **do** love. This may be confusing. But the sense of the verb is active. It is something we do. We are to love, and the fullest force of the word in the original language is to give oneself completely.

Why do so many marriages fail in our society? Because we have sold ourselves the idea that love is something we have or don't have (we fall in or out of love). No, love is a choice we make. We can never say that love has left the marriage, only that I choose to love no longer. Indeed, the experience of violence or adultery may make it impossible for us to continue to love. But we must admit that it is a personal choice that is the basis. We need a different idea of a world of instant gratification. To love in God's terms is about giving selflessly.

So, what is Jesus saying about faith?

First, it has a duty to God. We begin with totality - all our hearts, souls, minds, and things that make up our being. I don't know about you, but there is so much meaning in this that this is beyond our ability. I want to say that I have reached this in my relationship with God, but so much of the time, there is the sense that I am claiming

things for myself that I should be giving to God. You will know that I do not push church attendance as a measure of faith. I am the least plausible critic. I am paid to come!! But that does not mean that I support non-attendance. Instead, why are you not here this week? The teenager who parties hard each Saturday night and can't get up in time or the farmer who schedules to work is in a far different category to the mother who nurses a sick child through the night or the man who is engaged in extending the kingdom. I do not want to be in the place of judgment, but if you were honest in explaining it away in terms of not loving God to totality. We must not confuse being 100% available to God with being 100% open to the church. This is something that I ask you to reflect upon.

But we are not just about a relationship with God. Faith is expressed in how we relate to our neighbours, family and friends. Clergy are probably the worst. Get them in an unguarded moment, and they will list off the people holding up the kingdom. This diocese is littered with ministry units in which well-meaning clergy have sought to eliminate the problematic people from the parish roll. God challenges us with difficult people. There is no test in loving those that we like. Love is found when we can deal with the most challenging people. To sit to listen and do things for those who do not know the meaning of gratitude is precisely what is expected of us. Sometimes, I feel God gives us someone challenging to love to deepen our dependence on our love from God. We may not always have it in ourselves to love, but we can draw on our love of God and allow God to love them through us. I have spoken before about the open door that I see as the symbol of our faith. And this is indeed the path of Jesus - he loved those who crucified him. When we consider what he gave up becoming human, we ought only to think in terms of gratitude, but this was not Jesus' experience at all. Love of neighbour is about giving ourselves to the well-being of others God brings into our sphere of influence.

Faith then has a vertical dimension with respect to God and a horizontal one with regard to our neighbours. These form the cross, and our faith, without the Cross, is nothing. Let us commit ourselves again to living this faith in these two dimensions. Love of God without Love of Neighbour is idolatry. Love of Neighbour without the love of God is social work. Christianity Loves God and Neighbour together.

AMEN