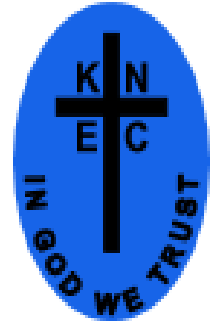




Kirkcaldy and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

www.knec4jesus.org.uk



Reading Mark 12 : 28 - 34

Sermon: 1 November 2009

The text for the sermon is verse

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" ¹

Mark is telling us a fascinating story this morning. It is fascinating because it is really the only time in all the Gospels where a scribe is favorably disposed of something Jesus said and where Jesus is making a positive comment on something a Pharisee or scribe said.

But let us get back to the story. After Jesus gave the Sadducees a very good answer with regard to the Law, a scribe who most probably was a Pharisee came up to Jesus and asked him the pressing question all the scholars of the Law struggled with namely which commandment was the most important. It was a contentious issue because the scholars of the law or the Pharisees deducted 613 commandments from the Old Testament. They divided it in two parts namely 365 of which were negative and 248 of which were positive. To them it was very important to stress which one was the most important!

Jesus answers him in the typical fashion of the day by quoting the Old Testament which he off course knew by heart. In this case Deuteronomy 6: verses 4-5 which is called the *Shema prayer*. The name is derived from the first Hebrew word *Shema* that means Listen. The Jews recited this prayer twice daily in the morning and in the evening. In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke the first part of this prayer is omitted. It is only in Mark that we find this reference. Maybe Mark wanted to put the answer of Jesus in the right context. The heart **was considered to be the** control center of your being, the soul – your self-conscious life, the mind your thought capacity, and strength your bodily powers. The Hebrew text does not mention "mind"; and the Greek translation of the Old Testament omits "heart"; but Jesus included both terms, stressing the comprehensive nature of the command

And there is a surprise. Jesus links the love to God with love to the neighbor. Marks quotes again from the Old Testament namely Lev 19:18 but in Jesus words this gets a new meaning. Jesus did not only mean fellow Jews like the text of Leviticus suggests. No Jesus means with neighbor everybody - even the hated Samaritans and Gentiles! In this case Jesus relates and merges the command to love God with the command "to love fellow human beings". Jesus showed that it was impossible to really love God without loving neighbors. Love for God is expressed by loving others.

¹ *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. Mk 12:28

Then the scribe says that Jesus is absolutely right in his assessment of the most important commandment and then adds similar thoughts from the Old Testament texts namely 1 Samuel 15, Hosea 6:6; and perhaps also Isa 1:11–17 where it is emphasized that God expects love more than offerings or sacrifices. The word translated “burnt offerings” refers to those offerings totally consumed on the altar.

The word that is translated for “sacrifices” refers to offerings in general, only a small portion of which was burned, and the remainder was given to the priest or returned to the worshiper to eat as a sacred meal. The two terms summarize and represent the entire sacrificial system.

Then Jesus said to him that he has indeed insight. It is the only place in the whole New Testament where the Greek word *vouνεχῶς* is used to describe Jesus’ comment. It is generally translated as “wisely” or “Discreetly” or “having his wits about him.” Jesus also says that he is “not far from the kingdom of God” -meaning that he still has to commit himself to follow Jesus.

Jesus is actually pointing out to the scribe the real problem the people of their day were facing. They worshipped God without having any focus. To them all the rituals, sacrifices and offerings were more important than having a relationship with God. Jesus is telling them again to focus on what is really important namely love to God, yourself and your neighbor.

Maybe this is the problem of our day also. I think the world we live in has lost focus too. We think that we can have a relationship with God on our terms and conditions. Sometimes we think of God as a puppet that we can control without realizing that HE IS the Almighty God. We also think as Christians sometimes that we can decide who is going to heaven and who is going to hell. We can be so discriminating when it comes to the love of God excluding people from baptism, Holy Communion, and even getting married in the church. We can be so quick in inventing rules and regulations that is totally not reflecting the love that God had for us. We forget that it is God who will work with the individual that is not committed to loving him with their hearts, souls, minds and strength. God will judge the character of human sinners. It is not our task as Christians to withhold the love that God had for us from others...His love knows no boundaries.

I think we have become the “weakest link” on earth because we think we can love God but hate our neighbors or ourselves. Yes people do not see the strong link we have with God which is reflected in our love and zeal for God. Maybe this is the reason why everything around is falling apart. Maybe it is because we lost our love for God that:

- Our marriages break up,
- why people do not want to get married,
- why there is child abuse,
- why there is domestic abuse,
- why our children do not want to commit to have a relationship with God,
- why there is poverty and hunger,
- why there is greed and murder,
- why there is hopelessness and all kinds of human evil,
- why there is suicides, alcoholism, drug abuse
- why there is so many cases of child neglect.

We as Christians must focus again on the things that really matter namely love for God, love for yourself and love for others remembering that we cannot love God without loving ourselves or others!

May we start today to work again on our responsibilities to love God, ourselves and others the way Jesus wants us to do.

Amen

Readings for the week.

Mark 12 : 28 - 34

The second commandment which Jesus gives in this text was not invented by Jesus as many Christians seem to think. It is stated clearly in Leviticus 19.18. It was known as the Royal Law (see James 2.8) as all the other commandments concerning human behaviour are summed up in it (see Romans 13.9). What Jesus did that was so radical was to link it to the Shema prayer in Deuteronomy 6, and say that there are no other commandments greater than these two. By doing this Jesus was effectively insisting that love of God and neighbour is more important than any form of ritual obedience, or religious adherence. Love matters more than any sacrifice or offering we might try to make to God. Knowing this, and knowing how important it is, brings us close to the kingdom of God. Keeping the commandment is what enables us to enter.

Other readings: Deuteronomy 6.1—9; Psalm 119.1—8; Hebrews 9.11—14

Prayer

Living God,
you love each one of us:
everywhere,
always,
with all the love you have.
Help us to love you
and to love other people
with all the love we have,
as Jesus did.

Amen