

Sunday, October 29, 2023 **“Who Do You Love?”**

***Psalm 90 | Thessalonians 21:1-8 Matthew 22:34-46***

Isidor Isaac Rabi, a Nobel Prize winner in Physics, and one of the developers of the atomic bomb, was once asked how he became a scientist. Rabi replied that every day after school his mother would talk to him about his school day. She wasn't so much interested in what he had learned that day, but how he conducted himself in his studies. She always inquired, "Did you ask a good question today?" "Asking good questions," Rabi said, "made me become a scientist." Asking questions- using W5 words of who, what, where, when, why as well as how, call many to seek answers which can be life-long journeys or with technology today and programs like Google, found in the moment. But just what are good questions worth asking and seeking answers for and to?

In order to ask a good question one needs to have motive behind the question and the desire to know the truth. Maybe just maybe this is why the Pharisees and Herodians keep turning to Jesus and asking him trick or loaded questions. They cannot answer their own questions so they turn to the One who speaks with authority has wisdom and digs deeper in to their minds than others. This might also be because all who are listening to the dialogue between the Pharisees and Jesus will have an experience, an a-ha- moment, that enables them to understand Jesus' point of view in a different and new perspective. This perspective is from God the Father and how the Spirit is moving amongst them while at the same time guiding Jesus to what is said and done.

In these last weeks we have heard the parable of the king's wedding banquet and the guests who could not come; about the difference between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God and where God fits into our reality as people of faith living in 2023. As we continue in reading from Matthew 22, the Pharisees come to Jesus again because they had learned that he had given the Sadducees even greater wisdom about God. God is "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And God is not the God of the dead but of the living." People had questions about God and it seemed they had been afraid to ask them until Jesus came along. The people asking questions were not only the community people, but those in leadership- Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians- those it we believed by many should already know of the God's teachings, the messiah amongst them and what prophesies might be fulfilled with Jesus' coming to Earth. Yet for many of these leaders, Jesus was seen as a threat to their power and influence over the people. So they sought to 'trip Jesus up' and have him disgrace himself and be removed from the synagogue by what he said and taught to others.

The Pharisees had gathered once again and with a lawyer as their spokesperson, asked this good question. “Teacher which commandment in the law is the greatest.” Jesus did not hesitate one second because he had learned this with a question designed to do damage to his now positive reputation in the community within the synagogue. But once again Jesus proves he is equal to the task and readies his answer in his typical fashion.

The question asked “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Were these leaders trying to get Jesus to renumber the TOP TEN of the commandments God had given to Moses or just what was being asked? If one reads the books of the Laws also known as the Torah in our Old Testament there were many laws included about proper behaviour with other people, what and how to eat, and the celebrations in life which cause us joy and sadness both. Were these the commandments that the Pharisees were testing Jesus with or just what were the important questions burning in their hearts about the laws God had called generations of His people to follow.

But without hesitation Jesus responds, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” He is reciting the Shema which is from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and often the very first section of Scripture that Jewish children (male and female) learn. It is the central affirmation of Judaism. The prayer expresses belief in the singularity of God, that is, in God's oneness and incomparability. Now, even though this question was used to test Jesus, it is nonetheless an important question. Perhaps in the life of Israel at that time it was THE most important question. And maybe it is the most important question we need to ask for today. Which is the most important commandment? Maybe just maybe our world needs to hear these words once again.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. Because if the world focused their life on God – fully on God –with heart, soul and mind, there would not be the ideas of greed, power and corruption floating around there. There would be notions of who God is and where our life should be focused today—on God. But how do we truly love God with heart, soul and mind when many people in our world do not know God.

Loving God with your heart means to love Him with your life by living a loving, faith-filled, and purpose-driven life. This requires letting God lead the way and living in close connection so we will know our calling/ our purpose. Once we let Him lead, our lives will be changed and we will experience joy. Sharing that joy with others and loving God with our whole heart will become

our primary mission. So how do we love God? Make an effort to get to know who God is. By spending time in prayer, reading Scripture, so that we come to understand who He is, what He cares about, and why He is so deserving of our love. God sent His only Son to die for us. He forgives us. He knows all of our faults and still loves us.

Loving God with your soul means to love Him for eternity. When our hearts stop beating, our souls keep living but God wants our relationship with Him to last forever. Loving God with your mind means to love Him unconditionally—because we know that He is worthy of love—even when we don't feel like it. Even when we feel like everything is unfair or when we think He's abandoned us: even though He never leaves our side God is with us.

Loving God with all our strength means stepping out in faith. It means stepping out of our comfort zones- helping someone in need when asked and doing something to assist. Faith without works isn't worth much. But faith with works can change a piece of the world for the better.

Jesus didn't stop with one commandment as the lawyer had asked for. Jesus said that a second is like it. "You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the laws and the prophets." Loving neighbours as yourself; so who is first here between others and self? Self-care because if one does not look after oneself, one cannot help others. But it is important to let others know that there are times that one needs time to get stronger and care for self.

Jesus then turned to the group of Pharisees who were gathered together. And he asked them this question, "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They answered, 'the son of David.' But Jesus raised concerns about their answer because of David's connection with God and with the Spirit. Jesus states Psalm 110:1 written by David and says, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." Jesus then asked the Pharisees maybe even to try and trip them up, "If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"

The Pharisees did not know what to say to Jesus. They did not know how to respond because they did not understand that yes the Messiah would be a son of David, that is many generations upon the earthly family tree, Jesus does appear, but in that moment they could not answer Jesus' question about David speaking to the Lord God. And it is in this moment that maybe they needed to reflect on Jesus' words before asking another question.

Questions are what is required for learning. Just think about this as we learn to read words, do math equations and eventually word problems. The problems however become more complex and often questions do not get to a deeper level that is required.

When we think about who we love our intentions are great but to what extent? To truly love God with all our strength is simple to say but not always easy to do. We need to remember that we do not work any of this out by ourselves. We have a strength working within us that enables us to keep on going forward. In reality, loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is simply a response. But why do we love? We are human and God created us to love, out of love. We love because He first loved us.

This is what Paul shares in his letter to the Thessalonian church people. He writes, "We deeply 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." Isn't this why we reach out to others in their times of need? We offer, prayer, hope, care, love in practical ways as well as in hugs, handshakes, smiles and words of hope. But what does it mean for us to truly love? We may not always see or feel the love which is shared from one to another or even from God to us as people, but there are definitely signs of who we love in what we say and do. This is because we put our faith into action. And when we put our faith into action we call it serving one another with God's love. Who do you love? Maybe we need to seek what we need and can do with hope and this is the work of the Spirit which most often tugs at our hearts.

A man once observed a young boy out in a field flying a kite. He noticed that there was something odd about the way the boy was standing and holding on to the string. He walked up to the boy and then learned that the boy was blind. He said, "Do you like flying kites?" The boy said, "I sure do."

This piqued the man's curiosity and he asked, "How is that when you cannot see it?" The boy answered, "I may not be able to see it but I can feel it tugging!" We may not always be able to identify the love of God in this world. Like the little boy, we may not be able to see love but it has a tug that lets us know it is there.

Let us pray :

Holy God of love we thank you that you call us to serve you in faith. You encourage us to ask questions, seek answers and to love others. Hear us O God as we love you and strive to do so with heart, soul and mind. SILENCE> Amen.