**Loving God, Loving others: Listen, focus, respond, Act**

Narrative Lectionary

October 6, 2019

Deuteronomy 5: 1-21; 6: 4-9

Mark 12: 28-31

This past year we have been exploring our needs and direction for our ministry together through the Joint Needs Assessment Committee which then changed to the [Faith Community Profile](https://gallery.mailchimp.com/8cc59dd291ea712eef909133f/files/09d8c6fc-a354-488f-89ce-6235c0bd214b/Eastside_Faith_Story_Final_Summary_and_recommendations.pdf). Two weeks ago, we approved the recommendations from this work and one of those recommendations was in relation to finding a balance between being inward focused and outward focused. The recommendation read: “We acknowledge that continued work needs to be done to balance the need for spiritual nurture and service to the broader community.” It is not a matter of deciding which is more important but finding a balance between the two. In our faith journey, both are important, it is not an either/or dualism but a both/and dialectic. Balance is important and essential for our community and within our faith. I believe this is what todays passages are addressing.

The ten commandments can be divided into two sections, the first four are about our relationship with God, and the last 6 are about our relationship with others. All are important, and they focus on two different areas. The commandments are a gift to promoting life – life with God and life with one another. They are important guidelines for us today and are relevant to our lives when we examine them. Let’s explore a few:

* Do not worship idols – what are the idols for us today that can seem more important than God and caring for others? Money? Oil? Sports? Celebrity activities? Preserving institutions?
* Keep the Sabbath – how well do we do at taking time to rest, renew, and regenerate our Spirit with God? This may not necessarily be attending church but even taking time to just read, relax, meditate, go for a walk.
* Do not murder – in a time when we hear more and more about mass shootings, and indigenous lives lost, this commandment is more relevant than ever.
* Do not bear false witness – honesty is very important today, particularly in our present political climate both here and in the US.
* Do not covet, or want what others have – does not our whole marketing system revolve around materialism and getting the next best thing that everyone has?

These are not easy to live out but we are called to try.

In the second part of the Old Testament reading we hear the teaching of what is known as the Shema – this is a prayer that Jewish people are to pray twice a day. “Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might”. It begins with the words “Hear O Israel”. Hear or Listen, means Shema. This video is helpful in understanding the importance of the Shema and what it means:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=205&v=6KQLOuIKaRA>

This message indicates that to listen, give attention or focus, respond, and act or do, are all part of loving God. When we do so well, we will love others. Jesus knew this. When he was asked what is the greatest commandment, he quotes the Shema, and adds from Leviticus 19:18, to love your neighbour as yourself. In two quotes from the Old testament, Jesus sums up the importance of how we are to live: loving God and loving neighbour. For those of us who often think of the Old Testament God as a God of wrath and vengeance, Jesus turns that thinking on its head. The God of the Old Testament is a God of love and calls us to love our neighbours. What does it mean to love our neighbours? It is not just a fluffy saying of being nice to one another. It means taking each others’ needs seriously. It means the hard work of caring for those who annoy us, anger us, or hurt us. This is not easy, but it is the hard work of love.

This week at our Craft-Study group we were discussing the Confession section of Rachel Held Evans’ book, Searching for Sunday, focusing on the cynicism we can get when disillusioned about church or other areas of life. There was a question that was: “Evans says that “many of our sins begin with fear” did a situation when you were cynical or lost hope relate to fear in any way?” In the discussion we were talking about situations where we are being bullied or hurt by someone, it can help to think about what they must be going through to treat someone so poorly. Sheri shared the story of talking with her grandson who was smaller, at age 9 or 10 who was often being pushed and shoved by a bigger boy. Sheri suggested to her grandson that this boy may be going through some tough times and invited him to ask this boy if he was sad and is that why keeps pushing him around. Her grandson tried it and the bullying stopped. When we recognize others may be hurting who are hurting ourselves or others, it can turn the situation around. It is loving our neighbour.

What other examples of loving your neighbour can you think of?

We are loving our neighbours when we work together to meet a need like our Glen Elm School project where together with the school, its students, and Munch Café 50 sandwiches are being made each week.

We are loving our neighbours when we call someone we haven’t seen at church for a while like Elaine from Congregational Care did this week.

We are loving our neighbours when we say yes to an invite and opportunity even though we’ve been really busy, like Sam and Delia did when they agreed to attend a New Ministry gathering of the United Church in Cochrane AB, that I could not attend.

We are loving our neighbours when people come out to help host a Cluster meeting for the Regina United Churches – thanks Linda & Larry Fowler, Bonny Manz, and Doug Scheurwater.

We are loving our neighbours when there is [forgiveness](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/botham-jean-s-brother-told-amber-guyger-i-forgive-you-n1062076) toward the officer that shot his brother, after acknowledging that she was truly sorry and we continue to work for an end to racism that causes such tragedies.

We are loving our neighbours when people like Elaine and Barb commit to a three week workshop on learning how to welcome guests on Sunday morning

We are loving our neighbours when we offer Messy Church to our community and invite families to come.

Loving God and loving our neighbour are two sides of the same coin. May we continue to work together to live out God’s commandments to love God and love others, as we seek to find a healthy balance of both in our community of faith.