

"Be Mine" Valentine's Day

Mark 12:28-31

Feb. 14, 2021

Valentine's Day is not an official day on the church calendar. According to the Lectionary, today is Transfiguration Sunday, based on the Bible passage where Jesus was up on a mountainside along with Peter, James and John when they caught a glimpse of Jesus in a glorified state as He was transfigured before them.

Today is also the last Sunday before the Season of Lent, which begins this coming Wednesday, and to mark the beginning of the Season of Lent, we're planning a worship service to start the 40 day Lenten Journey.

Well on this Valentine's Day - the day we are supposed to express our love and affection to all the special people in our lives, to our loved ones, to our spouses & partners, as well as to our parents, children, teachers and maybe even our pastors, Valentine's Day is the day to say: "I Love You!"

St. Mark's - "Happy Valentine's Day!" If someone's sitting next to you and you feel like giving them a hug go right ahead at this time! (And if you're by yourself, go ahead and give yourself a great big hug!)

Back when I was in Elementary School, which wasn't too long ago, I remember Valentine's Day sure was a lot of fun! All the kids would buy these Valentine's Day card sets, then we'd write the names of classmates on individual cards, and when we got to school, there was a table full of brown paper bags for every single student, and we would place our cards in the corresponding bags.



Then when we got home we would go through our cards and see who gave us a V-card!

It was innocent- it was a lot of fun, and some of the kids, instead of giving cards, they gave out candy and my favorite ones were the ones called: "Conversation Hearts" that had these little phrases printed on one side.



Well, to play on that theme, I found a "conversation heart" that captures today's sermon, and it's the one that says: "Be Mine."

Mark 12:28-31

Our Scripture for today comes from Mark 12:28-31, where Jesus quoted an old testament verse on love to a teacher of the law.

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?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second one is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these."

The question that the teacher of the law asked Jesus had nothing to do with Valentine's Day, but rather, had to do with the commandments.

The question that he asked was about the law and the question was to see if Jesus not only knew the commandments, but which commandment was the most important one.

So which one was the most important commandment?

Perhaps it's the first commandment since it's the first one.

"You shall have no other god's before me."

But that's not how Jesus answered, so it must not be the 1st commandment. How about the 2nd one? The 2nd commandment is:

"You shall not have any idols."

But Jesus didn't say this was the greatest command either, in fact, Jesus didn't name any of the 10 commandments because the question the teacher asked was a lot more complicated than it sounded on the surface and that's because on top of the original 10 commandments, the religious leaders added additional commandments so that by the time Jesus was asked this question, there were a total of 613 diff commandments on the books!

That's a lot of commands and a whole lot of rules!

So the question that the teacher of the law asked wasn't a multiple choice question with 10 possible answers, there was a possibility of 613 different ones.

Just for fun, take a look at this parking sign on the next page.

NO
PARKING
11 A.M. TO 1 P.M.
TUESDAY
STREET CLEANING

CVC 22651(N)
TOW AWAY
SCHOOL DAYS
NO STOPPING
MON THRU FRI
CCMC 7.03.215(0) 7:30 AM THRU 4 PM →

SCHOOL DAYS EXCEPTIONS
15 MON THRU FRI
MINUTES 7:30 AM TO 8 AM
SCHOOL BUSINESS
CCMC 7.03.300

CVC 22651(N)
TOW AWAY
SCHOOL DAYS
CCMC 7.03.010
1 HOUR PARKING
MON THRU FRI
4 PM THRU 6 PM
ONCE PER DAY, PER DISTRICT
CCMC 7.03.305
DIST. PERMITS 4
EXEMPT
→

CVC 22651(N)
TOW AWAY
CCMC 7.03.010
1 HOUR PARKING
NON-SCHOOL DAYS
SUN 12 MID-NITE THRU FRI 6 PM
ONCE PER DAY, PER DISTRICT
CCMC 7.03.305
NO STOPPING
FRI THRU SUN
6 PM THRU 12 MID-NITE
CCMC 7.03.300
DIST. PERMITS 4
EXEMPT

CULVER CITY BOARD PROHIBITS
THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:
• GOLF PRACTICE
• ARCHERY PRACTICE
• SKATE BOARDING
• SKATING
• OPERATING
• OPERATION OF ANY
• HANDBALL AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
84-428
REPORT UNLAWFUL USE BY PHONE

GREEN

It's pretty straight forward isn't it? Or is it?

It's as if you needed a Ph.D just to understand these signs. Which rule is the most important? Which rule has priority? Some rules apply on weekdays, while others apply on weekends, but there seems to be a whole lot of exceptions, and what's with those permits from District #4? Are they special? Why do they get the exemptions?

"Of all the commandments, which one is the greatest?" asked the teacher of the law?" Of all the laws, which one has priority?

Jesus' response. LOVE GOD, LOVE OTHERS
--

This is how Jesus responded.

He said:

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second one is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these."

The most important command, according to Jesus, isn't about where and when you can park your car, but about love. To love God and to love others.

Love the Lord your God,
with all your HEART,
with all your SOUL,
with all your MIND,
and with all your STRENGTH

This is what I want to talk about today!

How do I love thee?

Back in the year 1850, a poet by the name of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, wrote a collection of poems called: "Sonnets from the Portugese."

You might not have heard of Elizabeth Barrett Browning or the title of her book, but if I were to read to you the 1st line of her famous Sonnet #43, you might recognize her work.

Sonnet #43

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach, when
feeling out of sight for the ends of being an ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's most quiet need, by sun and candle-
light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use in my old griefs, and with my
childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose with my lost saints.
I love thee with the breath, smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death."*

I'm not a poet, (and I know it) and so I can't analyze this poem, but it sure seems like Elizabeth knew a lot about love!

"How do I love thee? Let me count thy ways!"

Jesus on Love.

Sonnet 43 wasn't written yet when Jesus was asked that question by the teacher of the law, and so rather than quoting a poet or reading a few lines from a poem, Jesus quoted a patriarch - in particular - He quoted Moses, who said in Deut. 6:4

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength."

The quote from Deut. 6:4 was known as the "Shema" which was a very popular quote among Jewish liturgy.

*Love the Lord, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, to which Jesus added one more, *to love the Lord with all your mind.**

With all your HEART.

Now, Jesus said that there are 4 different ways on how to love the Lord with our hearts, with our souls, with our minds, and with our strength, and on this Valentine's Day, I'd like to share a few examples of how to love God each way.

The 1st way to love the Lord, Jesus said was with all your heart.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart.

And what I like about the way Jesus said that first part, was how He said: with ALL your heart. Not just with some of your heart or with half your heart, but with ALL your heart.

As far as I know, human beings are born with just one heart. Just one heart. That's all we get. That's all we have - one heart that keeps us alive from birth until death. But unlike the heart, there are other parts of our bodies where we have more than just one.

For example, we have two eyes, two ears, two lungs, two hands and two kidneys. I can't explain why (I'm not a doctor) that's just how God created us.

But then there are things that we have more than 2 of.

For example our teeth. When we are born - we are born with 20 teeth, but by the time we become adults, we have 32 teeth.

Another example are bones. When we are born - we have around 300 bones, but by the time we become adults, we have 206 bones.

What about hair? Can we talk about hair? Wow! We're not just given 1 hair, we're given a whole boatload of hair! Did you know that the avg person has around 100,000 strands of hair on their head? One website even said "Blondes" have around 150,000 hairs, "brunettes" have around 110,000 hairs and "redheads" have around 90,000 hairs. I don't know if that's true, but isn't that interesting?

The human body is amazing! And what's even more amazing is that some of those body parts that we have a lot of, we can donate to someone else and still be alive!

For example, you can donate a kidney and still be alive. Or you can donate your hair and still look good! You want some of my hair? I'll give you a few 100 strands - just come on by!

But when it comes to the heart, we only have that one heart which you cannot give away and still be alive.

So, when it comes to loving God with ALL of your heart, Jesus wasn't talking about donating a little bit of it or giving a small portion, He was talking about total commitment and with everything you've got.

With all your SOUL

The 2nd way to love God Jesus said, was with all your soul.

Can I ask all of you to do something? Can you point to the part of your body where your soul is located? I bet if we asked 5 different people to do this, they'd point at 5 different places on their bodies.

"Where is the soul?" Or better yet "What is a soul?" Hmmm, that's a deep question.

Last Summer, a movie came out called "Soul" which was an animation.

The movie was about a guy Joe Gardner, who was an African-American Jazz Musician, whose "soul" got separated from his body.

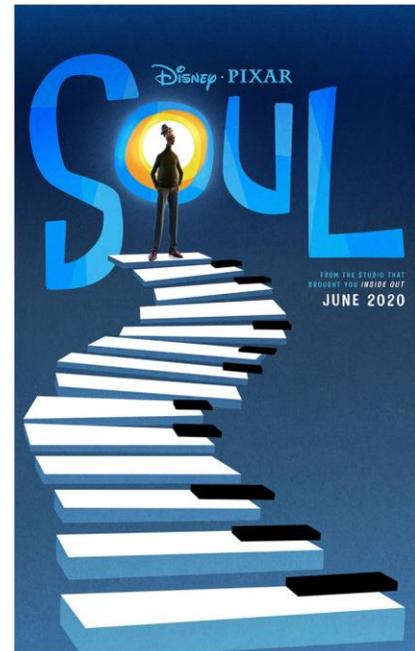
The movie dabbled a little bit with the afterlife, which wasn't completely accurate, so, "theologically" you have to give the movie a little bit of "theatrical" license.

The movie was also a tribute to the inspiring power of music especially Jazz!

Anyways, Joe Gardner the main character, think's his main purpose in life is about playing Jazz, but then he finds out that maybe it not about finding out your purpose in life, but as you're on that journey to live each day to the fullest and to live it with soul!

What does that mean: to live your life with soul?
I think the best way to explain it is with a musical example.

(note: my apologies to those of you who are reading this transcript. I played two musical clips during the worship. The first one was someone playing "chopsticks" in a very basic - flat - dry style. The second one was played by someone who was



a professional jazz pianist, and when they played that piece, the same song came alive! If you'd like to hear the two pieces on your own, here are the links.)

First clip: <https://youtu.be/r1XXnstW6Vk>

Second clip: https://youtu.be/MvSSb_7dsH0

There's "chopsticks" and then there's "CHOPSTICKS!"

There's living life and then there's "LIVING LIFE!"

There's "loving God and then there's LOVING God!"

with feeling,

with spirit and enthusiasm,

with verve and with soul!

How does that phrase go?

"Sing like no one's listening!

Love - like you've never been hurt!

Dance - like nobody's watching,

and Live - like it's heaven on earth!"

Love the Lord with SOUL!

With all your MIND

A third way to love the Lord said Jesus was with all your Mind.

"Love the Lord your God with all your mind."

Now, originally, this one wasn't part of the original "shema" in Deut. 6:4, and when Jesus added it - in Mark 12:30, the teacher of the law didn't say anything.

I don't know what to make of that and so I just left it alone, but apparently, this was important to Jesus to add this part about Loving God with our minds.

Question..... *"How often do you think about God?"*

or another way to ask it is: *"How often is God in your MIND?"*

We have a brand new puppy at home - she's the newest addition to our family. She's a lot of fun and really fun to play with, but since I'm at church almost every day, while my wife & daughter work from home most of the week, I don't get to see her as often as they do.

So, throughout the day, I'll check in with my family to see how the dog is doing, we also have security cameras which I set up by the dog crate, which I'll access several times a day, and when I get home, I'll ask my wife & daughter, *"How is the dog?" "What did she do today?" "Did she eat? Is she sleeping?" "Oh, and how are you by the way too?"*

I think it's safe to say I think about our new puppy quite a lot. "She's always on my mind!"

For some people - they're always thinking about "puppies." For other people - they're always thinking about "food." For some people - it's "sports" or a "hobby" maybe it's their grandkids...

I think you know where I'm going with this:
How about God? How often do you think about God? How often is God in your Mind?

If you're thinking about God only on Sundays
there's a lot of room for improvement.

If you think about God only for a few seconds right before every meal,
we can do better.

If you think about God right as you wake up and right before you go to sleep,
that's not bad...

There's a book called "The Practice of the Presence of God" written by Brother Lawrence.

Brother Lawrence was a humble cook at a French Monastery in the 17th century, and in the book, he gave this very practical idea on how to cultivate a deeper awareness of God's presence which was by starting to talk to God all the time.

He encouraged us to pray "short conversational prayers" continually through-out the day, rather than long winded prayers only once or twice a day.

He also encouraged "breath prayers" which are little brief sentences or simple phrases, like:

"you are with me"

"I depend on you"

"I want to know you"

"I belong to you."

Another way to practice the presence of God is to repeat little phrases from the Bible. "For me to live is Christ." "You will never leave me." "You are my God."

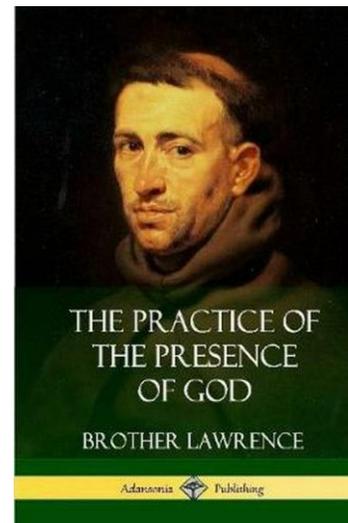
The goal was to do these as often as possible so as to root us deeply in conversation with God. To keep God in the conversation and to be aware of His presence.

With all our STRENGTH.

Finally, Jesus said to Love the Lord our God with all of our strength.

There's an extended member of my family - he's actually a brother in law, whenever there was a family gathering, we would greet every single person, with a great big hug! But he didn't just "hug" you, he hugged you with his whole body like you just disappeared into his chest.

It was like a bear hug and he squeezed so tight, that often times I would hear my joints crack! He gave these awesome "bone cracking" hugs! That guy hugged



with strength! It was a physical strength and being over 6 feet tall and a bigger person than me, I sure felt it!

But to Love the Lord with strength isn't always about having a lot of muscles and if I could play on the word "strength" it's not just about "physical" strength.

For example, if you were at an interview and the person asked you: "*What are your strengths?*"

You wouldn't "flex" and show your biceps, that would be kind of awkward if it was a pastoral interview, but you might say something like: "*Well, I'm really organized.*" Or, you might say something like "*I'm really good with people.*" "*I'm really good at praying.*"

"Strength" is not just about a physical trait, sometimes it's a talent, a skill, or a certain kind of ability that you're really good at and maybe better than others.

What are your "strengths?" What are you really good at doing that can be used to express your love to God as well as to others?

I don't know what your plans are for the rest of this Valentine's Day. Whether you have someone to spend this day with or not, but I do know this, that every single one of you is deeply loved by God, and today and as you go into this week, may you find creative ways to express that love back to God!