

## “The Emerging Love Ethic”

The Rev. Drew Willard  
UCC at The Villages, FL  
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Deut. 6:1-9, Mk 12:28-34

*When Jesus saw that the man had given a sensible answer, he told him,  
“You are not far from God’s kingdom.”  
After this, no one dared ask Jesus any more questions.*

*Mark 12:34*

Let us pray... O God,  
Help us to keep asking questions and not be content with what the crowd is saying,  
yet to find the answers we need that are true.  
Help us to be awake to how you are moving in our time  
and how we need to take action on our beliefs.  
Help us confront evil by first rooting out any fear, deception, and hatred  
in our own hearts.

Amen

Last Tuesday, Temple Shalom held an observance to remember the people  
of Tree of Life Synagogue who were killed, and those who were wounded,  
survived, and grieving.

I was invited to pray on behalf of the interfaith community  
and in my prayer, I asked God this question:

*Why? Why the Jewish people who have suffered so much in history?  
Why does this wretched mechanism of hatred continue  
against the Jewish people?*

As I asked the question, I began to find an answer – with another question:

*Is it because they truly are your people in a way  
that can never be separated from who you are?*

The Jewish people are the latest target in a series of violent attacks,  
but not only that.

They are among many vulnerable communities that have come into the crosshairs  
here in this country and throughout the world.

They are connected only in their vulnerability  
and not in their politics or race or religion.

Their opponents, however, are unified  
in their suspicion of and contempt for them...

I went on to pray:

*... The Jewish people are your oldest human friends, by name.*

*They are what you are all about as God –  
as a God of unity, but also diversity;  
of integrity, but also differentiation;  
of infinite grandeur and infinitesimal complexity,  
of personality, humor, beauty, courage, and love...  
and because of this, the Jewish people get in the way  
of those who covet domination.*

Willard, p.2

Last Sunday, I spoke of the difference between sado-masochism and love as two ways that groups of people function.

This transcends affiliation of citizenship, church membership, or family relationship.

Any kind of group can become dysfunctional through fear, hatred, and coercion or healthy through mutuality, respect, and empowering freedom.

Love – or rational loving-kindness, is the Way of Christ and when you set out on that path seeking God's Kingdom as a 'beloved community', you are already there.

You are already living a life of purpose, no matter what the cost.

Our lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures is one of the most significant for the Jewish community.

It includes "the Shema" – which calls people to be attentive – "Listen!" What follows is the affirmation that God is the only true God and then, the commandment to love God with all you've got.

When we say 'Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven', I have often made the connection that this 'Kingdom' that is possible as a social reality is a 'beloved community'.

The key ingredient for how that can come about is the phrase, 'thy will be done', God's 'will be done', and God's 'will' is the commandment to 'love'.

Jesus' conversation with that thoughtful 'teacher of the law' followed his argument with the Sadducees –

a group that was invested in the strict observance of Temple ritual.

The Sadducees had tried to trap him in a question about marriage and the afterlife, like the scribes and Pharisees would do on many other occasions.

However, this teacher – or rabbi, gave Jesus a 'softball' question, as they say in news interviews... and Jesus hit it out of the park to the approval of this fellow.

Jesus was ready with the Great Commandment as his comeback –

that we are to love God, but then added a verse from Leviticus 19:18<sup>c</sup>

challenging us all to love others as we love ourselves,

or to put it another way:

'Do unto other as you would have them do unto you'.

There is more that can be said "love neighbor as yourself".

Here is the context for that verse from Leviticus 19:9-18...

Willard, p.3

Leviticus 19:9-18 [CEV]

- <sup>9</sup> When you harvest your grain,  
always leave some of it standing along the edges of your fields  
and don't pick up what falls on the ground.*
- <sup>10</sup> Don't strip your grapevines clean or gather the grapes that fall off the vines.  
Leave them for the poor and for those foreigners who live among you.  
I am the LORD your God.*
- <sup>11</sup> Do not steal or tell lies  
or cheat others.*
- <sup>12</sup> Do not misuse my name  
by making promises you don't intend to keep.  
I am the LORD your God.*
- <sup>13</sup> Do not steal anything or cheat anyone,  
and don't fail to pay your workers at the end of each day.  
<sup>14</sup> I am the LORD your God,  
and I command you not to make fun of the deaf  
or to cause a blind person to stumble.*
- <sup>15</sup> Be fair, no matter who is on trial—  
don't favor either the poor or the rich.*
- <sup>16</sup> Don't be a gossip,  
but never hesitate to speak up in court,  
especially if your testimony can save someone's life.*
- <sup>17</sup> Don't hold grudges.  
On the other hand, it's wrong not to correct someone  
who needs correcting.*
- <sup>18</sup> Stop being angry  
and don't try to take revenge.  
I am the LORD,  
and I command you to love others as much as you love yourself.*

We don't do this, but it is in our sacred texts.

It comes to us from God through the Jewish people and their tradition.

We don't do this and we should,

but it a threat to the power structures that are in place.

This is why some people 'hate the Jews' and

why they hate those who act on this heritage of justice

that we have from the Jews.

It is really this message from the God of love – the God of mercy and justice,  
whom they hate.

Willard, p.4

What we all need to recognize is that sometimes  
‘they’ is us.

The fight against injustice begins with challenging ourselves –  
How do we think? How do we talk?

What are the words we use in talking about our ‘neighbor’?

What are the words we use in the jokes we tell?

Jesus was telling a joke when he said – to this effect,

“Now why would you notice a speck in someone else’s eye,  
but ignore the log in your own eye?”

He goes on to say,

“Take the ‘log’ away so that you can see clearly enough... to help someone else.”

Love your neighbor.

It’s the only real way that makes a difference in order to love God.

Amen

*Our lesson today from Deuteronomy 6:1-9  
is an important text in Jewish tradition and an element of worship.  
It includes the “Shema” –*

*“Shema, Yisrael! [Shem-Ma’, Yis-rah-el’]  
Adonai eloheinu [Ah-doh-ni’ ello-hay’-noo].  
Adonai echad” [Ah-doh-ni’ ek’-cod]  
and “Shema” means “Listen”...*

- <sup>1</sup>The Lord told me to give you these laws and teachings,  
so you can obey them in the land he is giving you.  
Soon you will cross the Jordan River and take that land.
- <sup>2</sup>And if you and your descendants want to live a long time,  
you must always worship the Lord and obey his laws.
- <sup>3</sup>Pay attention, Israel! Our ancestors worshiped the Lord,  
and he promised to give us this land that is rich with milk and honey.  
Be careful to obey him,  
and you will become a successful and powerful nation.
- <sup>4</sup>Listen, Israel!  
The Lord our God is the only true God!
- <sup>5</sup>So love the Lord your God  
with all your heart, soul, and strength.
- <sup>6</sup>Memorize [God’s] laws  
<sup>7</sup>and tell them to your children over and over again.  
Talk about them all the time,  
whether you’re at home or walking along the road  
or going to bed at night, or getting up in the morning.
- <sup>8</sup>Write down copies and tie them to your wrists and foreheads  
to help you obey them.
- <sup>9</sup>Write these laws on the door frames of your homes  
and on your town gates.

*Let us be challenged and guided by these words...*

Mark 12:28-34

<sup>28</sup> One of the teachers of the Law of Moses came up while Jesus and the Sadducees were arguing. When he heard Jesus give a good answer, he asked him, “What is the most important commandment?”

<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered,

“The most important one says:

‘People of Israel, you have only one Lord and God.

<sup>30</sup> You must love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.’

<sup>31</sup> The second most important commandment says:

‘Love others as much as you love yourself.’

No other commandment is more important than these.”

<sup>32</sup> The man replied,

“Teacher, you are certainly right to say there is only one God.

<sup>33</sup> It is also true that we must love God with all our heart, mind, and strength, and that we must love others as much as we love ourselves.

These commandments are more important than

all the sacrifices and offerings that we could possibly make.”

<sup>34</sup> When Jesus saw that the man had given a sensible answer, he told him,

“You are not far from God’s kingdom.”

After this, no one dared ask Jesus any more questions.