

B Narrative 29, 2020
March 22, 2020
Poulsbo
Pastor Alison Shane

Mark 12:28-44

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Thus far in the gospel according to Mark, we've got two main storylines. One is that Jesus teaches and heals, leading the scribes and the Pharisees and the Herodians to ask entrapping questions in the hopes that they might legally do away with him. The second is that Jesus tells his disciples that he's going to suffer and die and be raised, and the disciples ask stupid questions.

But today a scribe recognizes Jesus' wisdom and, going against his own tribe, breaking away from his own cohort, this scribe comes forward with a genuine question: "Which commandment is the first of all?"

It's as if Jesus is surrounded by all this noise of entrapping questions and stupid questions, and suddenly this one voice cuts through the noise.

Which commandment is the first of all? In all the clutter of the debates of rabbis and Pharisees, what really matters?

God. Neighbor.

Jesus responds: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

I agree. And also...

"You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

"You are not far from the kingdom of God."

This scribe probably doesn't realize how close he actually is. If he pursues this line of thought—God, neighbor, above all sacrifices—his fate will resemble Jesus'.

If he pursues this line of thought—God, neighbor, above all sacrifices—people will live.

You are not far from the kingdom of God.

God. Neighbor. Love.

There's so much noise in our world. Man, I thought there was noise before. But now I'm getting 50 emails every 6 hours (I mean, do I really need an email from every store I've ever visited telling me that they're cleaning the store? Do I have to pay attention to see who DOESN'T send me an email and worry that they're NOT cleaning the store?!? Do I really need an email from WAVE broadband telling me that my internet service will continue as always? Was I supposed to be worried that SARS-COV-2 would somehow jump from humans to electronics and infect my internet service provider with a virus?)

Not to mention the overabundance of advice and competing protocols and every official trying to beat the next official to the punch in telling us what we shouldn't do now. And Joe on Facebook is telling us it's the end of the world as we know it and Jane is tweeting that it's all a

big hoax, that nobody's really sick, and it's all a plot by aliens to take over the world. And if you haven't done it since you turned on the computer to stream this service, you should go wash your hands right now, and did you remember to buy a five-year supply of toilet paper?

God. Neighbor. Love.

What really matters.

God. Neighbor. Love.

Lent is a time to pause, to remember, to reflect. Remember how big God's love for you is. God loves you so much, God chose to become human.

A human who suffered, so that God would not be a stranger to our suffering.

A human who died, so that God would not be a stranger to our experience of death.

A human who was raised from the dead, so that we would know that God has life in store for us, now and forever.

God loves you so much that God is here, with you, right now.

God loves you so much that God has given you a mission, a purpose, even in these days of social isolation, of fear of physical illness, of an unceasing barrage of noise.

God cuts through the noise and says, "I love you. I've got you. Now let's love your neighbor together."

How do we love our neighbor in distance and isolation?

Tweet God's message of love for all. Spread laughter and joy on Facebook. Wash your hands often (yes, that is an act of service for your neighbor as you change your behavior to avoid transmitting even the possibility of a virus!). Get take-out from a local dining establishment. Keep patronizing the small businesses here—give them a call to see how you can purchase something. Keep giving to our community service organizations. Call someone you're concerned about and just ask how they're doing in all of this. Let them know you love them. Remind them that God loves them.

God. Neighbor. Love.

This is what really matters. God will love you through this, and God calls you to love your neighbor through this. Amen