

30th Sun OT – Matthew 22:34-40

“Two Greatest Laws”

“You shall love your God with your whole Heart, Soul, and Mind, and your Neighbor as yourself.” This is the most challenging commandment in all of the Bible. **Two commandments** reduced from 613 at the time of Jesus. Of course, those two are the greatest.

It is interesting that Saint Paul mentions that if one keeps those two greatest commandment all the rest will fall into place. Paul wrote his letters before Matthew’s gospel was written which today’s passage is from. He was summing up the two laws in his letters to the Galatians and the Romans. However, today’s second reading is Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians where he mentions that they must be models of that love, **“Be imitators of the Lord!”** Luke, a disciple of Paul, spells out who our neighbors are in his parable of the Good Samaritan.

Just out of curiosity I checked my Greek translation and found that the word for love that Jesus used was “agape,” which means a love that one is willing to die for. I’ve mentioned that before. Jesus re-interprets the Law in his Sermon on the Mount, and he also repeats the demands of the Ten Commandments to the **rich young man**, who went away sad because the passage tells us, he had many possessions.

Here is an interesting passage from Mark’s gospel, about the rich young man. You see, Matthew borrowed from Mark but edited his passage. Let me read you the edited passage and the one following it. “

*Jesus looked steadily at him and **loved him**, and he said, “There is one thing you lack. God and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”*

“And loved him,” agape, with a love willing to die for him. There is that agape love again! We see this love in mothers all the time for their children, and we see it in fathers willing to die for their loved ones, using their bodies as shields. Loving God is easy. Loving our neighbor is the most difficult thing we can ever do, especially agape love. It takes a lifetime, and hopefully most of us will never be tested.

Ronald Rolheiser in his article, *In Exile*, writes:

...When Jesus challenges the rich young man to sell all that he has and give the money to the poor and come and follow him, the young man does not respond because what Jesus was asking of him, to let go of his riches, meant exactly that he would have to let go of his *bloom*. He was most sincere, but he could not do what Jesus asked. He wanted still to give his seed without dying, to become generative with his bloom still intact. He went away sad.

Most of us want to be flowers without producing seeds. But the flower has to die first before the seed can be released and produce more fruit. At our age, generativity depends upon a willingness to die, to let go of both the search for ones' bloom and of that bloom itself.

As a seedling and budding young flower that it is, in a manner of speaking, essentially selfish. At this stage, it is primarily consumed with taking things into itself, with its own growth. That remains true until it reaches the stage just past its bloom. At that point, it begins to die and in that movement it gives off its seed and is then consumed by giving itself away. It becomes generative at the precise moment when it begins to die and its capacity to give its seed is directly contingent upon its own death.

This gospel asks us to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and our neighbor as ourselves. Are we willing to give it all away for the sake of agape love, or to walk away sad like the rich young man?

The hardest goodbye I have ever said in my life was to my Mom, standing at the airport entrance where my stood there waving goodbye, tears streaming down her eyes, again. I am thinking to myself not wanting to look back again at my Mom, why am I doing this again, each time when I get ready to go back to Africa for another two years? This is it; this is the last year; she is getting too old. Let someone else take my place. Sorry to say, she died that year.

Don't tell me about agape love. One doesn't have to die physically to experience it. I experienced it every time I went back to Africa not knowing if this was my last visit home. One doesn't have to let go of treasures, like the rich young man, one has to let go of whatever is holding our heart back from the Lord.