

What Matters Most

4th Monday of Lent



Mark 12:28-31

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'

No trick questions here. This scribe was genuinely interested in Jesus' opinion on an often discussed question: *Which commandment is the first of all?* Jesus answered with a combination of two Old Testament teachings. The first is to love God; the second is to love your neighbor. Loving God is all-inclusive: heart, soul, mind and strength. It is shown in all that you are and all that you do. Because we love God, we seek to serve God in our lives, to do what pleases God. That is surely the case with those we love the most on this earth. In fact, it distresses us when we have displeased or failed one we love deeply.

Closely aligned with love for God is love for our neighbor. Indeed, to love God means to love one's neighbor as well. Remember that Jesus draws the circle wide when defining neighbor. No one really is excluded. We are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. That is in the same way that we love ourselves. And so it would follow that in order to love our neighbor rightly, we must also love ourselves—care for ourselves as we would care for another. A bleeding heart is of no use to anyone if it bleeds to death. If you are going to serve God and serve your neighbor, a healthy dose of love for one's self or self-care is a prerequisite.

Prayer

As you have loved me, gracious Lord, grace me, I pray, to love others as well. Amen.