

## **“Spirit of Compassion”**

**July 21, 2019 ~ Pentecost 6C ~ Sacred Earth, Sacred Work**

**Rev. Beckie Sweet**

### **Mark 12:28-35** (NRSV)

28 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?” 29 Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30 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.’ 31 The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” 32 Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; 33 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.” 34 When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

*(The Message)* 28 One of the religion scholars came up. Hearing the lively exchanges of question and answer and seeing how sharp Jesus was in his answers, he put in his question: “Which is most important of all the commandments?”

29-31 Jesus said, “The first in importance is, ‘Listen, Israel: The Lord your God is one; so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.’ And here is the second: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ There is no other commandment that ranks with these.”

32-33 The religion scholar said, “A wonderful answer, Teacher! So lucid and accurate—that God is one and there is no other. And loving him with all passion and intelligence and energy, and loving others as well as you love yourself. Why, that’s better than all offerings and sacrifices put together!”

34 When Jesus realized how insightful he was, he said, “You’re almost there, right on the border of God’s kingdom.”

After that, no one else dared ask a question.

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“What the world needs now is love, sweet love!” Hal Davidson masterfully penned the lyrics to this timeless song, set to music by Burt Bacharach and made famous by Jackie DeShannon over 50 years ago in 1965.

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Have you listened to the news lately? Can you deny the truth of this song still today?

*What the world needs now is love, sweet love  
It's the only thing that there's just too little of  
What the world needs now is love, sweet love,  
No not just for some but for everyone.*

Jesus was asked at least once, which commandment was first, most important, most vital. His response:

*"The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;  
30 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.'  
31 The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'  
There is no other commandment greater than these."*

Or, as Eugene Peterson paraphrased this text:

*'Listen, Israel: The Lord your God is one;  
so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer  
and intelligence and energy.'*

*And here is the second: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.'  
There is no other commandment that ranks with these."*

The song continues:

*Lord, we don't need another mountain,  
There are mountains and hillsides enough to climb  
There are oceans and rivers enough to cross,  
Enough to last till the end of time.*

*What the world needs now is love, sweet love  
It's the only thing that there's just too little of  
What the world needs now is love, sweet love,  
No, not just for some but for everyone.*

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That sounds to me like the Spirit of Compassion. Compassion: with passion; with fire; with love; with courage; with purpose; fulfilling a calling. Jesus not only taught compassion, Jesus lived it. Throughout the gospels, in varying situations, Jesus’ heart always focused on those most in need. In the

parallel of today’s text in Luke’s gospel, Jesus goes on to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan, the kind Samaritan, the Compassionate Samaritan.

He offered that parable in order to illustrate that *every* person has the capacity to be compassionate. Sometimes the loving compassion comes from those from whom we least expect it! This takes the motivation of loving devotion to God, the confidence of love of self, and a healthy respect for the life of every neighbor. And, as Jesus is teaching us, all are our neighbors: those like us and close to us, those different from us, and those that some would identify as the “enemy.” **All** are our neighbors! The Spirit of Compassion which Jesus desires for us to display and act upon is an extension of hospitality. Now, hospitality is something that this congregation is particularly good at. We welcome folks in warmly, graciously, lovingly. NOW, Jesus challenges us to take that same kind of hospitality OUT into the world, that we may share our love of the One God through our interaction with all persons that we meet ~ Everywhere!

I realize that Jesus is challenging us to move outside our comfort zones. How do we do that most effectively? By overcoming our FEAR of the other. Carol Vaccariello states that, *“Once we move through and past our own fears, we become more gracious in helping others. As we learn to trust God and love ourselves, we discover our deep and true selves, in which lies the capacity to reach out to, and help others.”*

***What the world needs now is love, sweet love  
It's the only thing that there's just too little of  
What the world needs now is love, sweet love,  
No, not just for some but for everyone.***

And did you notice that when Jesus and the scribe realized that they agreed on embodying this love of God, love of self, and love of neighbor ~ the Spirit of Compassion ~ Jesus stated, “You are not far from the Kingdom of

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God!" In other words, when the Spirit of Compassion is experienced, the chasm between earth and heaven diminishes dramatically. We pray every Sunday that God's kingdom would come "on earth as it is in heaven." Friends, this is how we partner with God in helping that to happen. Embodying the Spirit of Compassion is the key! And we know in our hearts that it is not

enough to sit around and talk about Compassion borne of love of God, self, and neighbor. Jesus reminds us that we need to show it through our actions and relationships -- often! So, what is stopping us?

*Lord, we don't need another meadow  
There are cornfields and wheat fields enough to grow  
There are sunbeams and moonbeams enough to shine  
Oh listen, lord, if you want to know.*

*What the world needs now is love, sweet love  
It's the only thing that there's just too little of  
What the world needs now is love, sweet love,  
No, not just for some but for everyone.*

PRAYER:

Compassionate God, you who know our hearts and love us without condition,  
Create in us desire to see your essence within ourselves,  
So that we might see that in others,  
And honor your holy presence in all of creation.  
We praise you for this place, this day, these people, this planet,  
And the many ways that you entrust the care of this creation to us.  
Fill us to overflowing with your love:  
No, not just for some, but for everyone! Amen!