

3rd November, 2024

24th Sunday after Pentecost

The Great Commandment

Micah 6.2-8

Psalm 24.1-6

1 John 4.16b-21

Mark 12.28-34

Key Verse: "And 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." – Mark 12:30

As we gather today on this 24th Sunday after Pentecost, we turn our hearts to a profound and central teaching in the Christian faith - the Great Commandment. This commandment, delivered by Jesus in Mark 12:28-34, encapsulates the essence of what it means to follow God. Love for God and love for neighbour form the foundation of every Christian endeavour, shaping how we live, serve, and witness. Today, let us explore the depth of this Great Commandment, allowing it to speak to our hearts and inspire our lives. This commandment is a call to align our whole being with God's heart and His purposes, a call that can transform us and those around us. We will examine this theme through four key points, drawing from our readings in Micah, the Psalms, 1 John, and Mark.

1. The Call to Justice and Mercy – Micah 6:2-8

The prophet Micah delivers a profound message: what God requires of us is not empty rituals but a life of integrity, justice, mercy, and humility before God. In Micah 6:8, the prophet says, "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" The Great Commandment isn't limited to mere emotions but is expressed through action. When we love God with our whole being, we begin to see the world through His eyes. We see the needs of others, we hear the cries of the oppressed, and we are moved to act with compassion. God's love flows outward, prompting us to work for justice and to extend mercy to all. In a world filled with inequality and suffering, this call to justice and mercy challenges us to embody love in real, transformative ways. Imagine a neighbour who has fallen on hard times. Showing love might mean more than a kind word; it may involve providing a meal, helping with financial needs, or lending a listening ear. True love, rooted in God's justice, is always practical.

2. Recognizing God's Sovereignty – Psalm 24:1-6

Psalm 24 opens with a powerful reminder: “The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1). This proclamation emphasizes that everything belongs to God - our lives, our possessions, and all of creation. Recognizing God's sovereignty is foundational to the Great Commandment. To love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we must acknowledge that He is the source and sustainer of all life. This awareness keeps us humble and opens our hearts to worship. The psalmist asks, “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart...” (Psalm 24:3-4). Loving God requires purity of heart and a commitment to His holiness, recognizing that our love for Him shapes everything else in our lives. Consider a person who spends time in nature, observing the beauty of God's creation. This experience often stirs a sense of awe, reminding us of God's greatness and inspiring us to live lives that honour His creation. When we see the world as God's, we grow in love for both the Creator and His creation.

3. Perfect Love Casts Out Fear – 1 John 4:16b-21

In 1 John 4, we are reminded that “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” (1 John 4:16b). This passage emphasizes the transformative power of God's love. When we live in God's love, fear has no place in our hearts. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear...” (1 John 4:18). Fear often prevents us from fully loving others or taking bold steps of faith. However, when we truly understand that we are loved by God, our insecurities and anxieties diminish. This love becomes the foundation upon which we love our neighbours. We are called to love not just those who are easy to love but even those who challenge us. This radical, fearless love is at the heart of the Great Commandment. Think of a situation where fear might prevent someone from helping another. Perhaps we hesitate to reach out to a stranger in need or to speak up for someone who has no voice. But with God's love in us, we find courage to act, seeing every person as one created in God's image and worthy of love.

4. Wholehearted Love for God and Neighbour – Mark 12:28-34

Finally, we come to Jesus' own words in Mark 12. When asked which commandment is the greatest, Jesus replied, “‘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 neighbour as yourself.’” (Mark 12:30-31). Jesus emphasizes that these two commandments are inseparable. Genuine love for God is always accompanied by love for our neighbour. This wholehearted love means involving every part of ourselves - our emotions, intellect, will, and strength. Loving God in this way transforms how we view others and compels us to serve them. Jesus tells the scribe that this love “is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:33). It isn't about religious observance alone but a life transformed by love. Consider the story of the Good Samaritan, who saw a wounded

man on the roadside and chose to act with compassion. He did not consider the cost or the inconvenience; he simply responded with love. When we live out the Great Commandment, we become like the Good Samaritan, letting love guide our actions toward others.

Conclusion

The Great Commandment is more than a rule to follow - it is a call to a relationship with God and with one another, transforming every aspect of our lives. It reminds us that our faith is active, expressed through justice, mercy, humility, and fearless love. It challenges us to see all people as our neighbours and to respond with compassion and kindness. Let us commit ourselves anew to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. When we do, we become reflections of God's love in the world, living out the Gospel through our words, actions, and lives.

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank You for the gift of love that You have poured into our hearts. Teach us to love You with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Help us to see each person as our neighbour, deserving of compassion, kindness, and justice. May Your love cast out all fear within us, and may we live as reflections of Your light in this world. Guide us, Lord, in the path of the Great Commandment, so that we may bring Your love to all we meet. Strengthen us, fill us with Your Spirit, and send us forth to live as Your faithful servants. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.