

Matthew 22:34–46  
18th Sun. after Trinity  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
October 8, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

This morning we hear about the last two rounds of an ongoing fight between Jesus and the two main camps in Jewish thought at the time—the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees knew the Law well and taught it to the people. They were all about order and maintaining discipline by adding restrictions to the commandments of God. They took their faith seriously. The early Christians were always closer to the Pharisees' way of looking at things, which could explain why many Pharisees converted to Christianity, including Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and even the Apostle Paul. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were the liberals of their day. They worked in the Temple and were a bit looser in dealing with God's Word. They denied supernatural aspects of the faith, like the existence of angels and even the resurrection of the dead. Jesus argues with both groups, calling for a return to God's Word of Law and Gospel.

One of the Pharisees, a lawyer, asked Jesus a question to test Him: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" Jesus could have answered with any of the 10 Commandments. Maybe the Pharisees were looking for the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods." Or the third commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." As we saw in last week's Gospel reading, the Sabbath was a huge deal for the Pharisees. Or maybe Jesus would say what most of the world knows, the fifth commandment: "You shall not murder," or the sixth commandment: "You shall not commit adultery." Jesus could have taken it another

direction and emphasized the importance of Levitical dietary laws, or the covenant of circumcision, or the importance of offering right sacrifices in the Temple to distinguish God's people from the unbelieving world.

Instead, Jesus summarizes the entirety of God's Law in a twofold manner, like a coin with two sides: Love God and love your neighbor. Oftentimes people think God's Law is all about keeping us from doing what we want to do, forbidding what we find pleasurable, or what seems fun or convenient. Many people see God's commandments as a straitjacket that prevents man from developing into his true self. But here we see that the Law of God is all about love. The first and greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is a summary of the Law taken largely from Deuteronomy 6, the Creed of ancient Israel known as the Shema. Love God with every fiber of your being and it will go well with you. To love God above all is summarized in the first table of the Law, the first three commandments: Don't have other gods, don't misuse God's name, and honor the Lord's Day.

The second greatest commandment is like the first and actually flows directly from it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This is the "golden rule" that worldly philosophy inevitably arrives at. It's the secret to living a happy and fulfilled life in this world. If you just treat other people the way you would want to be treated the world would be a better place. Or if your problem is self-loathing then you can reverse the statement: Treat yourself the way you would want to treat other people. Give yourself the benefit of the doubt. Don't be too hard on yourself. Forgive yourself. Love your neighbor as you would love yourself, and love yourself as you would love your neighbor. This second greatest commandment is a summary of the second table of the Law, commandments 4–10: Honor father and mother, don't murder, don't commit

adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness, don't covet. Again, the second table of the Law, doing unto others as you would have them do unto you, is a conclusion any philosophy of this world ought to come to. It's simply a summary of the natural Law God has written on the hearts of all people, regardless of how many have seared their consciences so as not to recognize basic human decency and morality. Love God and love your neighbor. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. It's all about love.

In the Gospel of Mark's account of this exchange, the lawyer who asked Jesus the question about the greatest commandment then responds that loving God and loving the neighbor are "much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:33). That's why the LORD says through the prophet Hosea, for example, "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burn offerings" (Hosea 6:6). Jesus recognizes the wisdom of this response, and says to the man: "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." In fact, all the Law and the Prophets depend upon these two commandments. The entire Old Testament is about loving God and loving the neighbor. Jesus didn't come to abolish this Law of love; He came to fulfill it, to embody the perfect love required by the Law: love towards God and love towards the neighbor.

Love is the fulfilling of the Law (Rom 13:10). It sounds so easy. But as sinners, when we are confronted with the Law of love we see how loveless we really are. We take a look in the perfect mirror of God's Law and see how we have not loved God with our whole heart, soul and mind. Our heart has other allegiances. We give our souls to things of this world. We set our minds not on the things above but on our own sinful desires. We don't love our neighbor as ourselves. Instead, we hurt our friends and enemies alike. We think ill of others. We rejoice at another's wrongdoing. The Law of love sounds great until we realize how we consistently fall

short of the standard God has set for us. We experience lovelessness all around us and we ourselves end up putting ourselves first, before God and our neighbor. Love fulfills the Law of God, but our love is so often perverted and self-centered.

Jesus then asked the Pharisees a question to put things into perspective. The Law tells us to love God and our neighbor and then shows us how loveless we truly are. The Gospel then tells us how God loved us by becoming man to live a perfect life of love and in love, to die for our sins. Jesus asked: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” The Pharisees answer correctly: “The Son of David.” The Law and the Prophets point to a descendant of David who would sit on the throne of David for eternity. As the LORD said to King David directly: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish His Kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of His Kingdom forever. I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to me a Son . . . my steadfast love will not depart from Him” (2 Sam 7:13–15).

Jesus quotes Psalm 110: “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls Him Lord, saying: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet?’ If then David calls Him Lord, how is He His Son?” How can David’s LORD also be David’s Son? The answer to this question is the heart of Christianity. Nobody could answer Jesus, and from that day nobody dared ask Him anymore questions. And yet, for any Christian child the answer is obvious. David’s LORD is also David’s Son because in love, God became man. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is our Lord, who has redeemed us not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. David’s Son is also David’s Lord because the seed of the woman would crush the head of the

Serpent. David's LORD became David's son to live a perfect life of love and to die on the cross because of His love for you.

The Son of God is also the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered Himself up for you, rose from the dead, and then ascended to the right hand of God. There He awaits that day when all enemies will be defeated, when sin, the devil, and finally death itself, will lie crushed under His feet. In the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, Jesus says: "I am the root and the descendant of David" (Rev 22:16). David's son is David's LORD, whose Kingdom and steadfast love will never end. Jesus is the first and the last, the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself. These greatest of commandments can only be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Apart from Him you cannot love God and you cannot love your neighbor. But in Christ Jesus, love for God and others becomes possible. It begins in this life and is perfected in eternal life. In his first epistle, St. John says it like this: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:10–11). In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.