



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog for the Fifth Sunday in Lent "Passion Sunday" - April 3, 2022

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

St. Matthew 22:37-40 (KJV)

A while ago I read a sermon illustration by Pastor Michael McCartney of the Christian Hills Church in Chicago, IL about "four young men who were Bible College students and were renting a house together".

"One Saturday morning someone knocked on their door and when they opened it there stood this bedraggled-looking old man. His eyes were kind of marbled, he had a silvery stub of whiskers on his face, his clothes were ragged and torn, and his shoes didn't match (in fact, they were both for the same foot) - and he carried a wicker basket full of unappealing vegetables that he was trying to sell. The boys felt sorry for him and bought some of the old man's vegetables, just to help him out then he went on his way.

"However, from that time on, every Saturday morning the old man appeared at their door with his basket of vegetables. As the boys got to know him a little bit better, they began inviting him in to visit a while before continuing on with his rounds. And they soon discovered that the old man's eyes looked marbled not because of

drugs or alcohol, but because of cataracts. They also found out that he lived just down the street in an old shack. Moreover, they learned that the old man could play the harmonica and that he loved to play Christian hymns because he really LOVED God. As a result, every Saturday morning from then on, the boys would invite the old man in, and he would play his harmonica and they would sing Christian hymns together. They soon became good friends. So, the boys began trying to figure out ways to help him.

“Hence, one Saturday morning, right in the middle of all their singing and praising, the old man suddenly said to the boys, ‘God is so good!’ And they all readily agreed, ‘Yes God is so good.’ The old man went on, ‘You know why He is so good?’ And they asked, ‘Why?’ He replied, ‘Because yesterday when I got up and opened my door there were boxes full of new clothes, and shoes, and coats, and gloves. Yes, God is so good!’ At which point, the boys grinned at each other and chimed in, ‘Yes God is so good.’ However, the old man wasn’t finished. So, he asked the boys again, ‘You know why He is so good?’ The four boys answered, ‘You already told us why. What more?’ Whereupon the old man with a big, toothless smile replied, ‘Because I found a family who could really use those things, so I gave them all away.’”

This sort of “rocks our world” doesn’t it? Here someone **who has virtually NOTHING** is given an incredible gift (in terms of what this world has to offer, anyway) and then **gives it away**. Now why would he do that? Simple...*because he GETS it!*



The story of the rich young ruler is found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels in the New Testament (specifically in: St. Matthew 19:16–22; St. Mark 10:17–22; and St. Luke 18:18–23, respectively). For our purposes today, I’ll make use of St. Matthew’s version of events:

“Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, ‘Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?’ ‘Why do you ask me about what is good?’ Jesus replied. ‘There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.’ ‘Which ones?’ he inquired. Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’” ‘All these I have kept,’ the young man said, ‘What do I still lack?’ Jesus answered, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’ When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’”

This, too, sort of “rocks our world” doesn’t it? Here someone **who has virtually EVERYTHING** is given an incredible gift (in terms of what the next world has to offer) and then **refuses to accept it**. Now why would he do that? Simple...*because he DOESN'T GET it!*



So why did Jesus tell the rich young ruler that he could be saved by obeying the commandments (recalling that the young man had asked Jesus in verse 16, *“Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”*, to which Jesus had responded in verse 17, *“If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”*)? To understand Jesus’ response to the rich young ruler’s question we must consider three things:

- 1. the background of the rich young ruler;**
- 2. the purpose of his question; and**
- 3. the essence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Now, at first glance it appears Jesus is saying that the young man

(and, by extension, all people) must obey the commandments in order to be saved. But is that REALLY what Jesus was saying? Since the essence of the salvation message is that **we are saved by grace through faith** (as St. Paul takes pains to explain in Romans 4:5-8 and Ephesians 2:8-9), why would Jesus appear to offer the rich young ruler an “alternative plan?”

In truth, though, Jesus used His conversation with whom, evidently, is a Jewish man – as no Roman would address Jesus as “teacher” or “master” – to teach the detrimental effect that money can have on one’s desire for eternal life (verses 23-24), as the young man was, no doubt, a ruler in the local synagogue and (according to verse 22) had “great wealth.” As a result, the primary lesson that Jesus draws from this incident concerns “love of money” and not “salvation” – whether by one’s works (which is false) or by God’s grace (which is true). Thus, when (in verse 18) the young man asks Jesus to specify which commandments he should keep, our Lord (in verse 19) recites five of the original Ten Commandments, plus a summary commandment:

“... love your neighbour as yourself.”

To which the man (in verse 20) replies with the key statement:

“All these I have kept... What do I still lack?”

The young man was obviously religious and sincere in his pursuit of righteousness. His problem was: **he considered himself to be faultless concerning the Law**. And this is the very point that Jesus challenges (in verse 21) by telling the man:

“If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Unfortunately (for the rich young ruler), he decides that Jesus is asking too much. Consequently (according to verse 22):

“... he went away sad, because he had great wealth.”

Rather than obeying Jesus' instructions, the rich young ruler turns his back on the Lord and walks away. Please note: in telling the man to "keep the commandments" Jesus was not saying that he could be saved by obeying them; rather, Jesus was emphasizing the Law as God's perfect standard. So, when the rich young ruler responded that (in his humble estimation, anyway) he met the Law's standard, Jesus simply touched on one issue that proved the man did not measure up to God's holiness.

In short, the rich young ruler was not willing to follow the Lord Jesus Christ if it meant giving up his wealth. Moreover, in reality, the young man was breaking the two greatest commandments: he did not love the Lord with all his heart, mind, and soul; and he did not love his neighbour as himself. For if the young man had truly loved God (and other people) more than he did his property, he would have been willing to give up his wealth to the service of God and of humanity - **but that was not the case**. Instead, the rich young ruler had made an idol of his wealth. Consequently, he loved it more than he loved either God or neighbour. So, with surgical precision, Jesus exposes the greed in the young man's heart - greed that the young man himself did not even suspect he possessed. Accordingly, Jesus' statement (in verse 18) that "only God is good" is thereby proven in the young man's ultimate response to Jesus' command. Thus, in His conversation with the rich young ruler, Jesus did not teach that we are saved by our works with respect to the Law; rather, Jesus used the young man's love of money to show how far the man actually fell short of God's holy standard (as we all do, by the way). In truth, then, the rich young ruler needed the Saviour - **and so do we**.



As mentioned last week, today we will continue with our in-depth examination of the Ten Commandments by focusing on the latter three of the six that pertain to loving "our neighbour" - meaning that

God expects us not only *to care for our neighbour* but *to see as our neighbour anyone who is in need*. Because our Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit purposely created ALL people in His image. Furthermore, the Lord Jesus Christ willingly endured His passion and physical death to save ALL people from the eternal penalty of their sins (that is, **their spiritual death**). Hence, both of God's mighty acts (of creation and of redemption) signify that at the heart of Christianity is the belief that ALL people - male or female, irrespective of nation or religion, with whom we live or who we chance to meet - have inherent worth and dignity, PERIOD. Which is the reason why we are taking the time this Lent to study God's Ten Commandments (as found in Exodus 20:1-17) in general, and also why we are taking the time today (and took last week) to examine the six Commandments that deal with loving "our neighbour" in particular (remembering that, as I mentioned last Sunday we will focus today on the second three of those Commandments).



The Eighth Commandment (Exodus 20:15):

"Thou shalt not steal."

In His Commandments, God specifically forbids injury to our neighbour. Therefore, as we heard last week, the 6th Commandment, "Thou shalt do no murder" forbids us to injure our neighbour in his own person, and the 7th Commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" forbids injury to the person to whom one is bound in marriage. Today, with the 8th Commandment, "Thou shalt not steal" we are forbidden from injuring our neighbour **in his goods**. (In fact, both the 8th and 10th Commandments focus on respecting and honouring the possessions of others.)

In particular, this Commandment forbids the act of taking someone

else's property. Thus, it condemns all forms of taking something that doesn't belong to us including: cheating people out of their money or property; or employers depriving workers of their just wage; or employees not giving employers a full day's work for a full day's pay (by wasting time at work), or giving away to their friends things (for which should be paid) for free, or stealing supplies, or, simply, taking without asking. Embezzlement, fraud, tax evasion, and vandalism are also considered to be violations of the 8th Commandment, as is stealing someone's good name by slandering them.

The Ninth Commandment (Exodus 20:16):

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour."

In His 6th, 7th, and 8th Commandments, God has forbidden us to injure our neighbour **by deed**; now with the 9th Commandment, we are forbidden from injuring our neighbour **by word**. In short, then, this Commandment condemns all forms of lying, which primarily occurs in two circumstances: either in a court of law; or during ordinary conversation.

In a court of law, violation of this Commandment can happen via the three kinds of persons present in a court proceeding. The first person is the plaintiff, who makes a false accusation (as warned against by Moses in Leviticus 19:16):

"Thou shalt not be a detractor nor a whisperer among the people."

The second person, according to Proverbs 19:9, is the witness who lies while giving his or her testimony:

"A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will perish."

The third person (as Moses cautioned in Leviticus 19:15) is the judge who sins by giving an unjust sentence:

“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly.”

During ordinary conversation, a person may violate the 9th Commandment in four ways: the first is by “**detraction**” (which means “to diminish” or “to speak badly of someone or something”); the second is by **listening to detractors** willingly; the third is by **being a gossip** and repeating whatever is heard about someone; and the fourth is by **being a flatterer** or one of those who speak “honed words.” As King David counsels (Psalm 12:2-3):

*“Everyone lies to their neighbour;
they flatter with their lips
but harbour deception in their hearts.
May the LORD silence all flattering lips
and every boastful tongue...”*

And St. Jude warns (in verse 16 of his brief General Epistle):

“These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.”

Because God is “The Author of All Truth,” all human beings (because they were created in the His image) are obligated to honour the truth. Thus, as true Christians, the most obvious way to fulfill the 9th Commandment is **not to LIE** (that is, to intentionally deceive another by speaking a falsehood) PERIOD. In addition, we should keep confidences and not spread rumours – whether they are true or not.

The Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17):

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is his.”

The 10th Commandment forbids both the desire for having someone else's property ("thy neighbour's goods") and someone else's spouse ("thy neighbour's wife"). As previously noted, this commandment (along with the 8th Commandment) condemns theft and all feelings of envy, greed, and jealousy in reaction to what other people have (especially with their choice of life-mates) which, as per our examination last Sunday of the 7th Commandment ("Thou shalt not commit adultery"), reveals a sinful, intentional longing for immoral sexuality. As was stated then, our Lord Jesus Christ said that to sin in the heart meant lusting after a woman (or a man) with the desire to engage in immoral sexual relations with them, and that just as human life is a divine gift from God – and, thus, needs to be respected, defended, and protected – so, too, is human sexuality, which is considered sacred only within the proper context of marriage between one man and one woman.

Bearing all this in mind, then, **this is one of the most difficult of God's Commandments to keep** in this day and age of multi-media over-saturation and electronics one-up-man-ship, because (via the Internet) we have instant access to (and immediate gratification for) everything that fuels our desires. Additionally, we see our friends with the "latest and greatest tech gadget" and yearn to have it too. As a result, we find ourselves (for the most part) in the exact same place as that nearly blind, harmonica-playing, old man (when we first meet him, that is) **in that we all have pretty much nothing of worth in this life.**

However, as followers of Jesus Christ, it behooves us to "mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the fact that spending precious time and energy in desiring what others have is contrary to what we should be about. Instead, like that nearly blind, harmonica-playing, old man (after we get to know him, that is) we ought to spend our precious time and energy working toward furthering God's Kingdom here on earth, by loving and doing good to all others regardless of whether we (or they)

are: male or female; young or old; married or single; working or not; parents or children; rich or poor; famous or unknown; etc. For we (but only if we so choose, that is) have all been given the most precious and inexpressible gift: **God's love**, as our Lord Jesus Christ Himself promised (St. John 3:16):

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Thus, all we who call ourselves Christians have a choice to make:

- 1. we can keep God's wonderful gift all to ourselves, just thinking of how blessed we are to be saved and living out our lives with the idea that we are somehow special; or**
- 2. we can give that gift away to someone who could really use it (we could actually be neighbourly and share the gift of God's love with those who don't yet know Him - those who haven't been shown what it truly means to love completely, freely, unselfishly, and non-judgmentally), with the only reward being the satisfaction of sharing God's love - the same love that He so graciously gave to us.**

Again, as beings created in the image of the Creator (in that we have each been Divinely given the right to make our own decisions), the choice is left with each of us.



Next Sunday, "The Sunday Next Before Easter" or "Palm Sunday", we will wrap up our detailed analysis of the Ten Commandments. In the meantime, my earnest prayer on this Fifth Sunday in Lent, this "Passion Sunday", is that we shall all choose to love passionately our Lord God by loving our neighbours - whoever and wherever they are.



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