

Love God Love Others 1

“WHAT MATTERS MOST (THE JESUS CREED)”

Mark 12:28-34

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.

Mark 12:28-34 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

What’s going on in our country?

You don’t need me to tell you that some awful things are happening. We’ve had another school shooting—17 people killed at a high school in Parkland, Florida. Another horrible, senseless tragedy. Meanwhile the political wrangling continues in Washington. And people in general just can’t seem to get along.

So, what’s going on?

The problems are complex and multi-layered, and there are no simple solutions, but I do see one thing that’s happening that *we in this church can do something about*. And this problem that I see happening is at the root of a lot of our other problems. It explains why we can’t get along. It explains why we’re so divided. It might even be at the root of these horrible shootings that we’ve had. *And it’s a problem that we in this church can do something about*.

What I’m talking about is the breakdown of COMMUNITY – the deterioration of RELATIONSHIPS. We have lost the capacity to live together in community and commit to relationships. We’re becoming more and more isolated—more and more divided—less and less able to form deep relationships that give meaning to our lives.

Electronically, through computers and cell phones, we're more connected than ever. But in terms of vital community, we're more isolated than we've ever been.

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Our vision at Main Street is to "Foster Vital Communities." A community is a network of relationships. It can be a town, a church, a small group, a neighborhood, a support network—any group where you can know and be known, love and be loved, serve and be served, celebrate and be celebrated.

Every human being needs that. Every human heart *longs* for vital community

And so we at Main Street want to help make that happen! And what we see in today's Scripture is THE NUMBER ONE KEY to Fostering Vital Community! Mark 12:28-34 contains the key to vital community. If we're going to live out our vision as a church, then we have to live out this Scripture.

SO PLEASE PRAY WITH ME: Lord, we mourn for the victims of the latest school shooting. We mourn for the general state of our country—the division, the lack of relationships, the breakdown of vital community. Today show us what we can do. Speak to us through your Word, and make us the kind of people who center our lives on What Matters Most. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Look at Mark 12, beginning in verse 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?"

Now this scribe is one of the religious leaders—he's part of the Jerusalem establishment. And when he says first, he doesn't mean which comes first in a list. He means, Which is the greatest? Which is the most important?

In other words, he's saying, "Jesus—**What Matters Most?**"

- What's really important?
- What's life really about?"

And the answer Jesus gives him is the key to Fostering Vital Community – verse 29—

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.'

NOW, here's the thing – this was not news! There's nothing radical or different here. Every good Jewish person standing there *knew* this was the greatest commandment, because they all said it at least twice a day!

This is an ancient Jewish creed called the *Sh'ma*—Sh'ma being the Hebrew for “Hear” – as in “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

Moses commanded the people to say this “when you lie down and when you rise up.” Every night when you go to bed. Every morning when you wake up. At least twice a day, and preferably more, they were supposed to say out loud,

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.

And this Jewish creed, called the Sh'ma, became like a prayer – almost like a mantra. They would say it throughout the day to remind themselves that there's only one God, and they owe him everything. So when Jesus pointed to the Sh'ma, he wasn't saying anything new or different.

It's the next thing he said that's the game-changer. Jesus took the ancient Jewish creed called the Sh'ma, and he added something –

So let me ask you a question: How many of you are familiar with the Apostles' Creed? It's the oldest affirmation of the Christian faith that we have. A lot of you grew up saying it. We say it whenever we have a baptism.

How would you feel if I came along and added something to the Apostles' Creed? Like maybe towards the end: “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, and in pulling for the UNC Tarheels, and in giving 20% of your income to the church!”

How would you feel if I added something to the Apostles' Creed? *Well, that's exactly what Jesus did with the Sh'ma!*

Jesus quoted the Sh'ma, and then he added this– Verse 31:

The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Aha! This is new. This is radical. This is a game-changer.

Jesus says, Loving God is the most important thing, but it's not enough! If you're going to love God, *then you also have to love people.*

Jesus takes this ancient Jewish statement called the Sh'ma, and he agrees with it, but then he adds to it. And by doing this, he creates a new creed that author Scot McKnight calls

“The Jesus Creed”

The Jesus Creed says that God cares a lot about your relationship with him, but God also cares a lot about your relationships with others.

The Jesus Creed says that Loving God and Loving Others are the most important things in life.

What matters most? Loving God, Loving Others.

And this is the key to vital community. To be in vital community, we have to love others. But to love others well, we have to love God. It's our relationship with God that gives us

Love God, Love Others. That's what matters most. And that's the key to vital community.

So how do you make that happen? How do you become the kind of person who loves God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loves your neighbor as much as you love yourself?

Well, here's what Scot McKnight says: Scot McKnight says that we Christians should use the Jesus Creed the same way Jewish people use the Sh'ma. Jesus was Jewish; the first Christians were Jewish; and as good Jewish people, they would have recited the Sh'ma at least twice a day, probably more.

And it's very possible that when Jesus took the Sh'ma and turned it into the Jesus Creed, he meant for us to do the exact same thing: Memorize it, and recite it at least twice a day—"When you lie down, and when you rise up"—and then any time throughout the day that it comes to your mind.

Scot McKnight says that he's been saying the Jesus Creed between 30 and 50 times a day for over ten years, and he says this has changed his life. It's changed his character. It's impacted his decisions. It's helped him grow spiritually.

So let me ask you a strange question. When it comes to spiritual growth, are you more like a lion, or a hummingbird?

When it comes to your spiritual formation habits, the practices you pursue to grow spiritually, are you like a big, burly, majestic lion, or a tiny little hummingbird flitting from here to there?

Here's the thing: A lion eats one big meal—and then he goes off and sleeps for days. A hummingbird eats throughout the day—and he keeps moving—pollinating plants, making a difference, changing the world around him.

When it comes to spiritual growth, some of us are like a lion. Why? Because we have one meal a week, and then the spiritual part of us sleeps for days.

Some of us do a little better—we have devotions in the morning, or we're in a Bible study during the week—but we're still lions – we feast, and then we sleep.

We want to be like hummingbirds. Hummingbirds eat throughout the day. They feed themselves all day long. They come back to the feeder 30, 40, 50 times a day.

That's what we want to do. We don't want to just hear the Word on Sunday, and we don't want to just read the Bible in the morning and forget about it. We want to feed ourselves throughout the day—all day, every day—constantly reminding ourselves of what matters most.

And a way to do this is to recite The Jesus Creed—when you lie down, when you rise up, and throughout the day whenever it comes to mind.

And this isn't just a memory exercise. The idea is to turn this into a prayer. And if you keep saying this prayer constantly throughout the day, it's going to sink in. It's going to shape you. It's going to impact your decision. It's going to transform who you are.

So let's try this: Throughout the season of Lent – which is basically the next six weeks try saying the Jesus Creed, on a regular basis throughout the day—when you go to bed, when you get up, and throughout the day whenever it comes to your mind.

Consider this an experiment in Spiritual Formation.

To start with, you'll probably need to get your Bible out this afternoon and write it down on an index card—or maybe print it out from a Bible website—and carry that around with you and read it until you've got it memorized. Then once you've got it memorized, let it become your constant prayer throughout the day.

Let's try this and see what happens! Let's see if we grow spiritually. Let's see if we become more loving and more Christ-like. Let's see if this increases our capacity to "Foster Vital Communities."

And let's start right now by saying the Jesus Creed together:

"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart,

with all your soul,

with all your mind,

and with all your strength."

The second is this, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

There is no other commandment greater than these.

AMEN.