

The "E" Word
No Shortcuts
Matthew 22:34-40

"Hearing that Jesus silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert of the law, tested him with this question, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All of the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

So today I want to show you there is no short cuts in loving your neighbor. Jesus was always first to demonstrate how to serve. Jesus said, "I did not come to be served but to serve and give my life up for many." He did not rule from a distance but served through demonstration.

Jesus doesn't just tell us to obey the Great Commandment; he shows us the way as well. I want you to see the way Jesus was tempted by Satan in a new way this morning. Satan wasn't merely questioning Jesus' identity; he was questioning Jesus' way of being the Messiah.

Think about it, Satan was tempting Jesus to prove himself through the self-satisfying (turn these stones into bread), by the spectacular (throw yourself down and let angels catch you), and through possessions and power (giving him kingdoms of the world). But Jesus would not make the trade or take the shortcut. Satan was tempting Jesus to be a nonserving, nonsuffering, nonrelational Messiah.

See, Jesus' M.O. is to move in close. His way is service, sacrifice, and relationship. That's the Jesus way. And speaking of the way, did you know that the Bible and other historical books often referred to believers as ***"The people of The Way."*** Saul, before becoming Paul said in a conversation, ***"He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem."*** I'm sure Saul got this from Jesus' own words when Jesus said in his own words in ***John 14:6 "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."***

I like what Inagrace Dietterich said about the people of the way. He said, "The early followers of Jesus were not called people of "the experience," or the people of "right doctrine," or the people of "moral values," or even the people of "the church." They were called the people of "The Way." They were known for the way they lived, not only for what they believed or valued. Christians were associated with a particular and discernible way of living and relating that both grew out of their faith and gave testimony to that faith. More than just individuals who had a changed religious position, they were now a new people, a new community embarking on a new way of life, a life worthy of their calling."

Being people of “The Way” gives off the idea that something is clearly different about us. The early Christians weren’t giving up their freedoms or their lives for doctrine, an ideology, or an organization. They were following a person who was the Way, the Truth, and the Life. A resurrected and serving Messiah transformed everything.

So how does all of this translate to you and me? Jesus said something that I find so fascinating. The Pharisees were up to their old tricks again when they asked Jesus a question. “Teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said, “What is written in the Law, he replied, How do you read it?” He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your strength and with all of your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” You answered correctly, Jesus replied. Do this and you will live.”

“Do this and you will live.” That is a promise I believe Jesus longs to fulfill. Living a life of loving your neighbor should be life giving. This is truly a life worth living. This is what obeying the Great Commandment could look like in your life:

- ***Knowing the names of your neighbors.***
 - ***Praying for your neighbors.***
 - ***Inviting your neighbors over for a meal.***
- ***Taking care of one another when someone is sick.***
- ***Consoling one another when we suffer losses.***
- ***Loving our neighbor because we are Christians, not because we are trying to make them Christians.***
- ***Introducing people to Jesus as the Lord and Savior.***

For some of you here this morning you are recoiling in your seat right now because the thought of inviting a stranger into your home is terrifying. And to others, this is right up your alley. And finally for some here this morning your just glad you made it to Sunday service. So let me break it down like this. Here are 3 options for all of us wherever you comfort level is. The first option is start small: This simply means meeting and interacting more like actually looking at your neighbor when they look at you. Talking to them in your front yard. The second way is Just Go: This is taking it up a notch by organizing something with a few families that live around you, like having a bonfire together or a grill out at your house. And the last one is Go Big! This is when you get the whole block together. The point is start somewhere and see what happens through a simple act of obedience.

If this freaks you out still, then pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give you boldness because Jesus did not leave us powerless!! Let the Spirit of God direct you and lead you! “Do this and you will live.”

Lastly, the first thing I need to work on in being a good neighbor is me. How much do you love yourself? Am I doing the things for myself to have a voice and a life that is worthy of bringing to the alter? It's tough to help your neighbors when you or I are just running on fumes ourselves. I want my neighbors to say of me, "I know more about Jesus because I know Jimmy." Or, "My image of who Jesus is changed because of him."