

Bring Our Hearts
Mark 12:28-34
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
November 4, 2018
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

Today is a day of remembering *and* of looking ahead. And what a wonderful combination that is. We are so used to seeing only in one direction that we often forget that looking back and looking forward are related. Thankfully, sometimes the stars align in such a way that we are reminded of their connectedness.

And this has happened as we come to worship on this first Sunday in November remembering loved ones whose lives have come to an end even as we also bring our commitments for shared ministry together – our intentions that say that there is still work to be done, that we will continue the work of the saints who have gone before us, that we will continue the work to which God calls us.

And so, here we are. And our text for the day again comes from the book of Mark. And let's take a minute to remember what all is going on here in Mark. Back in chapter 11 is the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. So, one of the things we know is that we are meant to understand these stories in chapters 11 – 14 as stories of the last week of Jesus' life. This means two things. First, there will be some important teachings here as we build to the climax and as Jesus' life comes to an end. And secondly, there will be increased conflict with the authorities which leads to his arrest and finally his crucifixion.

But here, in today's story, we see that Jesus and the scribe are not in conflict, but rather find a point of agreement. In fact, today's conversation starts not as a challenge to Jesus' authority, but because the scribe in this story has been listening and has heard Jesus answer well.

And it so it is from that position that he asked the question, “Which commandment is the first of all?”¹

And Jesus answered with an answer that is familiar to people of faith across the Judeo-Christian tradition. After all, this wasn’t a new idea coming from Jesus. His Jewish faith had taught him that everything came down to these two – love God and love neighbor. In fact, whether looking at the Ten Commandments or the 613 laws in the Torah, they really all come down to two things – loving God and loving neighbor.

Upon that, Jesus and the scribe in today’s story agreed.

So, why is this important for us?

Over the last few weeks as we’ve been asking the question, “What shall we bring?” we have talked about bringing our action – committing to work for justice and to show loving-kindness. We have talked about bringing our wealth – about the reality that Jesus talks about money far more than we would often like to acknowledge and, that while a necessity in our lives, money is also one of the things most likely to get in the way of our relationship with God and with other people. And those two conversations lead us to today, when we are talking about bringing our hearts, our whole selves. Because the reality is that we can do the right things and we can share generously, but their impact increases when we do them out of a love for God and neighbor, when we do them recognizing the connectedness of all creation and the whole human family, when we do them because we are so deeply connected that we can’t do otherwise.

One of my most vivid memories from the first congregation I served happened in a board meeting. Now this may surprise you, as many of us have been in more than one board meeting, at the church or other places, that we would like to forget. But this board meeting made an

¹ Mark 12:28b, NRSV.

impact. This was a small country church located in NE Missouri in a community that was more of an intersection than a town. It was a congregation that prided itself on being served by students from Culver-Stockton College and that understood its ministry to be about helping young people discover whether or not they were called to be pastors. It was a congregation of good, faithful, generous farmers and blue-collar workers.

So, there we sat in our board meeting and it came time for the treasurer's report. I don't remember how much money we had in the bank, but what I do remember is Lucy Belle, our treasurer and pianist, who said, "This money isn't doing anyone any good sitting in the bank. Who needs it more than we do?" And without questioning whether or not they should, the other board members just started talking about the needs of their community – about the family down the road who didn't have enough to eat, about the man who was a member of the Baptist Church whose cancer treatments were taking a toll on his bank account. And within minutes the money was distributed.

The people around that table were generous people. But it was more than a desire to share money that motivated them that day. More than being financially generous, that table was filled with people who understood that loving God and loving neighbor were inseparable. They were unwilling to come and worship on Sunday and then just go home and take care of themselves. Instead, they knew that if they really loved God, they would pay attention to the people around them and they would take care of them.

Today is Commitment Sunday here at First Christian. In a few minutes we will invite you to share your pledge cards upon which you have indicated your intentions for financial support of the ministries we do in the coming year. We will also invite you to share the yellow sheets upon which you have indicated ways you feel called to serve in ministry, to pitch in and

be a part of what happens at and through First Christian. Those are the concrete things that we can write down and put in the baskets that will be passed.

But what we are really asking for is more than that. We are really asking for you to bring your hearts and your full commitment. Yes, we want your money. In fact, to continue in ministry, we need your money. You and I – it is our gifts that make First Christian viable. But we don't *just* want your money.

Yes, we want your time and your talents. In fact, we need you. We need you to be active in ministry and to work together to make a difference here and in the world. But we don't *just* want your time and talents.

What we are really asking for is your heart. A heart deeply rooted in the heart of God. A heart that asks, at every choice and every encounter, where God is and where God is calling you. A heart that sees the friend, the neighbor, the stranger, even the enemy, and looks for the presence of God within them. A heart that is willing to work on behalf of the other, even to risk yourself for the other.

As we have remembered loved ones today, it is this very quality in many of them that drew us to them. And as we think about the people still living who inspire us, it is often this as well. These people who we aspire to be like are often the ones who have shown us what it means to care for your church, for your family, but more than that for the world. They are often the ones who have shown us what it means to be connected to God and to neighbor.

Presbyterian pastor, Rev. Erin Counihan, writes these words about someone she loved, “It wasn't just her laugh. Yes, so much, it was her laugh. That. Big. Massive. Explosive. Wonderful. Laugh. But it was also her love. And her relentless hope. And wisdom disguised in silly outfits, strength wrapped in funky jewelry, steadfast service dipped in one-line jokes. It was the way she

loved children. It was the way she loved strangers. A lot of the time, it was the way she loved me. Like no one else did. But mostly, it was the way she loved [God]. With everything she had and was and did and laughed and danced and played and everything. All of her. It was how she loved [God] in big, bold, radical ways. How she loved [God] in genuine, givin-real-people-the-real-shirts-off-her-real-back ways. And how she loved [God] in the silent and secret ways, ways I'll never even know. It is still, how I am closer to [God] because I know how she loved [God]. It's still, how I hold stronger hope in [God], because I know how real [God was] to her. It's still, it's always, it will ever be, how she taught and showed and helped all of us to love [God], in how she lived her life for [God].”²

May each of us be those who love God in big, bold, radical ways and because of loving God, who love our neighbors enough to share the shirt off our backs and to share our whole hearts.

May it be so.

Play stewardship video by Carl and Jan Christensen, then Dale lead act of commitment.

² <https://revgalblogpals.org/2018/11/01/thursday-prayer-for-all-the-saints/>