

Mark 12: 28-34

Peace Sunday – Which Commandment is the first of all?

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To love the whole world for me is no chore;
My only real problem's my neighbour next door.

The concept of neighbour changes in the area where you live. When I was growing up the idea of neighbour carried throughout the whole town where I lived. Almost everyone in town was your neighbour. Not in the next door sense but certainly in a “we are all in this together” sense. When I moved to the city of Windsor my idea of neighbour changed. I no longer knew everyone on the street. As I walked along my desire to look others in the eye changed. I found myself looking behind me more. Turning corners a bit more cautiously, I was much more aware of my surroundings.

I was in the “city” now and I barely knew what my next door neighbour looked like let alone their name and who their parents and siblings were. That changed a bit as we moved from downtown living into a neighbourhood.

This was quite a change for me and yet it became a way of life. From Windsor we went to Kingston where once again neighbour became another concept. Going from a single family dwelling to an apartment was quite an adjustment. Not knowing the area at all we had no clue what areas of town were considered “bad”. We ended up in an apartment building that, we found out later, was known for being “rough”. We had no problems there and actually had some friendly encounters with other apartment dwellers; but names and intimate details were not part of the conversation.

Yes, the concept of neighbour changes from area to area. It also changes with the amount of time one has spent in a particular area. Most of you have known one another for the better part of your lives. You know where one another lives; who your extended family are; where each of you works; and for the most part you have some knowledge of one another's interests.

Loving our neighbour as Jesus defines neighbour includes the things I have mentioned but it also includes something else. Neighbour, as defined by the great commandment, means all others; everyone we share the planet with. Now, you might ask how that can be? A neighbour is someone you know personally. But the second part of the great commandment is to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. It doesn't say be nice to people; it doesn't say tolerate people; it says to love as you would love yourself. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Does that sound familiar? We say it every week, the question is do we live it?

Can we honestly say that we treat others as we would like to be treated? All others? How about black people; native people; Asians; emotionally and physically challenged people; Sikh's, Muslims; can we honestly look at ourselves and say we treat all others the same?

The answer is no we can't. We can't because we have not known those we would call "other" intimately. It would be next to impossible to know one another to the point of not treating them differently. Someone, somewhere once said that you can never really know a person until you have lived with them, and broken bread with them. Instead, we make assumptions about them rather than try to know them. We create a story about their life that we really have no insight to and usually that story has us blaming them for our understanding of their different way of life; justifying our view of them.

The reality is that we are all similar. We all want the same things for the most part. A house; people who care for us; food on the table; a job or some feeling of worth to the community. We strive and sometimes ache for these things; but we don't all have them. There are those among us whose housing is less than adequate, who cannot find sustainable work, who are not socially able to function to **our** expectations in our communities and we treat them differently. We judge their every move. We challenge their every attempt. We talk about them behind their backs, not out of concern, but merely to gossip.

They become our scapegoat for all that is wrong in the world. If only they would get off drugs or alcohol...just stop; what, what then?
If only they would get a job...there's got to be something they could do, they're just lazy; what, what then?
If only they behaved more normally...they're so weird; what, what then?
How would we respond to them then? Would we love them as we love ourselves?
Would we love them if they became just like us? After all we only have ourselves to compare normal to.

This Sunday is designated as Peace Sunday within the church calendar. It is a day for us to acknowledge our need and desire for peace and to recognise those who long for peace all around the world. We are looking for a peace that will last, a peace that respects others; a peace that flows from each of us to our neighbour. A peace that sends a message to our governments of our wish to bring the troops home; a peace that reminds our governments that we common folks don't need to be the most powerful in the world or the richest country; a peace that forgives us our trespasses and we for give the trespasses of others.

Perhaps the peace that we long for cannot be accomplished until we can forgive.

There are but two commandments that are the first of all. Two rules to follow that if they are followed the others given by Moses would not be necessary...Love the Most High God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You must love your neighbour as yourself.

There is no commandment greater than these. Peace