

St. Andrew's UMC
October 26th, 2008
Matthew 22:34-46
"Love Your Neighbor As Yourself"

The other day I watched a two year-old clip from the TV comedy show, Colbert Report, an interview of the Congressman of the 8th District , Georgia . The Congressman cosponsored a bill requiring the Ten Commandments to be placed in the Assembly buildings and the courthouses. You can watch the clip on the net. Near the end of the interview, the host asked the congressman the final question: "What are the Ten Commandments?"

"You want me to name them?" "Yes."

The Congressman hemmed a little, and said, "Do not murder...?" At this point, Colbert held up his fists, and flipped out one finger. Do not lie...? Do not steal...? I don't know."

You could hear the hilarious outbursts of laughter in the background the whole time. I guess the point he made was, why was the lawmaker so hyped up about the Ten Commandments, when he could not even name them?

So, Jesus took pity on those who have trouble memorizing, and boiled it down to just two: Love your God with all you heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind; the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself." There. Isn't that simple? Turns out, it is not.

I think I have shared with you this before, but in one of the small towns, I used to attend the clergy association's monthly luncheon. At one meeting they decided to draw up a statement, or the confession of faith, and have every clergy put their signature on it. Part of that confession was accepting that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, and that we uphold the Ten Commandments.

So I emailed the chairperson why not believe in the great commandment about loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves? That way, I thought it could be more inclusive. The answer I received was that they would like to keep our association Christian, and did not want to include Mormons. I do not know where

the Mormons stand among those clergy, since Mormons now injected millions of dollars in the California politics for Yes on Proposition 8.

Here we need to stop and think: should the politics inform the gospel, or should the gospel inform the politics? For Christians, I hope that the answer is the latter.

Funny thing about word is that it can mean more than one thing. If you listen to those who support Yes on Proposition 8, they do so, because they believe that the Word of God, the Bible, tells them that the same sex marriage is not a right thing. If you listen to those who say No to Proposition 8, they say it is about the equal rights, the human rights. Does the Word of God take priority over the human rights, or do the human rights take priority over the Word of God? Or, should they be one and the same?

If the Word of God compels Christians to say Yes to the Proposition 8, what does the gospel say? The gospel that we have read today, says that you shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. **“The second is like it,”** Jesus said, **“love your neighbor as yourself.”** What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself? How does the gospel inform the politics?

I was searching the net with the phrase, “love your neighbor as yourself,” and its variants. I came to a website that did an interpretation on the very scriptures, Leviticus 19:18, from which Jesus quoted his saying to the Pharisees:

You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

The interpreter was a Jewish person, and he argued that the neighbor which the scripture meant was the Jewish one. It did not include the foreigners. Only the foreigners who assimilated to the Jewish ways, i.e., observing the ritual laws etc., were treated as neighbors. In other words, if you are not like us, we do not have to love you as ourselves. No commandment is thus broken, and everything is kosher.

Such a way of interpretation is not limited to Jewish interpreters. Christians do share that tendency, as well. Jesus did declare that divorcing and re-marrying for the reasons other than unchastity would make the wedding parties commit adultery. Things changed, and no one brings that up at the wedding ceremonies held in the churches and cathedrals. As a matter of fact, just about any church denomination and clergy actively bless such matrimonial unions between divorced man and woman.

Many claim that the marriage between the same sexes would threaten the institution of the marriage. But they are silent when a millionaire-octogenarian marries a woman who could be his own granddaughter, or even great-granddaughter. Such a marriage would not threaten the institution of marriage, but the marriage of loving, same sex couple would?

Why such an understanding and support for any type of marriages between different sexes, while such a rigid opposition against those of the same sexes? If we want to apply the inerrant the Word of God to correct the ills of the society, shouldn't it be applied equally and fairly to everyone, regardless of one's sexual orientation, race, gender, etc? Is the inerrant Word of God routinely applied only against those who are unlike us?

So the writer of the Luke wanted to tackle this interpretive latitude which people tend to exercise, in order to keep certain group of people outside of the neighborly circle. Luke put the two great commandments in the mouth of a scribe, not in the mouth of Jesus. Jesus affirmed him, and said, **"You have answered right; do this, and you will live."** Then Luke comments that the scribe asked this question, because he wanted to look righteous: "And who is my neighbor? (Lk. 10:29)"

Jesus went on to tell the scribe the parable about a man who was robbed. His own countrymen, priest and Levite, both religious leaders, ignored the victim, and passed by. But the Samaritan, who was regarded beneath a dog by the contemporary Hebrew, helped him and saved him. Jesus asked the scribe who was the neighbor to the victim. The scribe answered that it was the Samaritan. Jesus told him, **"Go, and do likewise."** It is timeless that Jesus chose

religious leaders to illustrate the callous ignorance. Things did not change much, did they?

In this story, Jesus made it clear by implication that the racial, religious, or political difference made no difference as far as helping the one who is in need. A neighbor is the one who helps out another in need. Jesus does not care whether one is Muslim or Christian, enemy or friend, black or white. Jesus told the scribe: you *be* that neighbor.

From this parable, we conclude that loving one's neighbor as one's self goes beyond any difference that we may encounter in one another. We all come from different backgrounds, with different philosophies, with different political and cultural upbringings. If we had difficulty helping those who were in need, simply because of these differences listed above, then it is clear to us what is informing what. Our gospel cannot inform the politics, because of these differences. Rather, our politics inform our gospel, and shape our religion, precisely for these reasons.

I would like to ask those who are committed to the inerrancy of the Word of God: Is the gospel integral part of the Word of God? If so, shouldn't the gospel inform our political thought processes?

Or, does the gospel apply to only those who are like us, to only those who have assimilated to our ways of life? Should my love, my care, my prayers, and my heart go out to only those with whom I can agree on variety of political, cultural, social, and philosophical issues? Is that what Jesus meant, when he said, "Love your neighbor as yourself?"

These are the questions we should ask ourselves rather harshly.

Our congregation declared years ago that we are a welcoming, reconciling congregation. We are given the opportunity to measure how effective our declaration is today. What does it mean to us to love a neighbor as ourselves, as far as the Proposition 8 is concerned? How does our politics inform the gospel? How does the gospel inform our politics?

That is the question we must answer before November 4th.