

**Not Far From the Kingdom**  
**Mark 12:28-34**  
**HUMC 7 November 2021**

About fifteen years ago, I used to visit a lady from our church who was the most passionate Red Sox fan that I had ever seen. Inside of her apartment, she had a table of Red Sox memorabilia, a mini cardboard Fenway Park, bobble heads of former players and other items. Next to her recliner was the colorful Red Sox year book and a two-inch book on baseball statistics. On her wall was a picture of Ted Williams hitting a home run.

This was her routine. On the day of a Red Sox game, she turned on her wide screen TV set. At the same time she followed the rival New York Yankees game on her computer. Around the 7<sup>th</sup> inning, she would go into her bedroom to watch the final two innings, then she went to sleep.

When I would go over to pay a pastoral visit, she would talk about her beloved Sox and many times she was angry with this or that player or the manager. I did manage to sneak in a talk about the Lord.

Even today, I still think about her even though she has been gone a long time. The question that I have to ask myself: Do I love the Lord and am I passionate about the things of Christ as this woman was with her beloved Red Sox?

My scripture text is Mark 12:28-34. This is Jesus' response a scribe on how we are to love the Lord with our heart, soul, mind and strength.

**<sup>28</sup> One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"**

**29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'<sup>[a]</sup> 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'<sup>[b]</sup> 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>[c]</sup> There is no commandment greater than these."**

**32 "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."**

**34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions. May God grant you understanding of his words.**

On door frames in the homes of many Jewish families is a little cylindrical box called a Mezuzah. Actually I have seen quite a few of them in senior apartment complexes. But inside of this little decorated copper box is a passage from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 which says:

***"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God. The Lord is one, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."***

And the Mezuzah is a reminder to the Jewish families and their guests that as they come into their house, there is an admonition not to forget. But to love the Lord our God with every ounce of our being.

In our scripture text, Jesus was asked by one of the scribes which commandment was the most important. Jesus quoted the same passage of scripture that is found in the mezuzah.

You see when God created us, he designed us with this innate desire to know and worship Him. I think it is a good thing to have reminders like the mezuzah.

Consider this young girl who hugged her doll and said to her mother, "Mother, I love her and love her and love her, but she never loves me back." And I suspect that is how God might feel about some of his children.

Our faith is a two-sided relationship. He loves you but many do not love him back.

The scribe who questioned Jesus knew God's law quite well, since he made his living by copying the text. Actually, he was also in agreement with Jesus with its message, but the problem was that he went no further.

In a sense he didn't allow it to change him or go down the path of actual discipleship.

That was sort of the problem John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church had. In the beginning of his ministry, his relationship with God was one-sided.

Things did not really change until he experienced the witness of the Holy Spirit at an Aldersgate Bible Study and prayer meeting.

It was then at one of these meetings that he had a personal encounter with Jesus. It became a two-way relationship with Heavenly Father. John Wesley's spiritual life had a new beginning.

When we love the Lord, it is with all our heart, our soul, our mind and our strength. It encompasses all of our passions, desires, affections and affects about how we feel towards our God. It is similar to the lady who love the Red Sox. It consumed her.

When we truly love God, it inspires our thoughts and stimulates our desires. With Christ in our hearts, we are energized to love the Lord and we want to know him and to follow him into a deeper personal relationship.

- Heart is how we feel about God.
- Soul stimulates our desires.
- Mind inspires our thoughts about Him.
- Strength is a galvanizing force.

Now the scribe had solid theology and his beliefs and religious practices trended in the right direction. In a sense, he was close, but did not take the final step.

I know a lot of people who are like the scribe in which they are so close to a personal relationship with God. They know the Ten Commandments and the stories of creation. They can tell you about the life of Jesus and how to live the Christian life. But for some reason, they have not taken the most important step, the actual prayer of inviting Christ in their life.

Once we invite Christ into our hearts and begin to truly love the Lord with all our entire being, it is a lifetime commitment.

When I was younger, I was tempted to give up my faith and go my separate way but I am glad I didn't.

Robert Robinson had a marvelous conversion to Christianity and became a minister of the gospel.

In 1758, he wrote a hymn called, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing." It is a hymn we have sung in this church. Years later, after Robinson had written this hymn, he was a passenger in a horse drawn coach and there was a woman who sat across from him.

After polite conversation, this woman began to sing the forementioned hymn.

“Come thou font of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace.

As the woman sang the words, Robinson said nothing. Then she got to the third verse:

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love. Here’s my heart, O take and seal it, Seal it for the courts above.”

Robinson interrupted her and politely asked if she would stop because the words hurt his head.

The she asked, “Why would you not want to listen to such an inspirational hymn?”

To which he replied, “Because I wrote those words and look at the drunken condition, I’m in.” Robinson later died as a penniless alcoholic.

If we do not live according to the gospel, the last place we would want to be is in a church. Because hymns, prayers, sermons will all make us uncomfortable. But on the other hand, when we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, we will want to:

- Spend time with Him.
- Read about Him in His book.
- Sing His praises.
- Try to live our lives in such a way that pleases Him.
- Help others.

Let me ask, do we love Him with all of our heart?

I want to close with an anonymous quote. "I'm a tabasco man. Anytime I eat virtually anything, I put tabasco sauce on it. When I go places, I enjoy discovering new kinds of hot sauce. I love fire in my food. The absence of fire for me means a bland dish".

Do you crave God as much as this person loved tabasco sauce? Do we find God in everything we do? Do we find life bland without God?

May our relationship with the Lord be passionate and we put effort into loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Let us review our scripture:

**<sup>32</sup> "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. <sup>33</sup> To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."**

**<sup>34</sup> When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.**

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