

31 October 2021: The Twenty Second Sunday after Trinity

Psalm 119: 1-8; Mark 12: 28-34 [13-27]

'LoG=LoN&LoN=LoG' - Michael Brown

SETTING: JERUSALEM IN THE TIME OF JESUS, IN THE HOUSE OF A LAWYER.

PEOPLE: A LAWYER (L); HIS WIFE (W); JESUS, A WANDERING TEACHER (J).

L: Good evening, dear wife! **W:** A good evening to you, dear husband! You look tired but thoughtful as well. **L:** As ever, I can't hide anything from you. Yes, definitely tired but happy as well. Making my way home I saw a group of the Temple singers holding an informal rehearsal on a street corner. Their psalm seemed a fitting conclusion to the events of today.

Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart, (Psalm 119: 1-2a)

W: Well, I know those verses are from one of your favourite psalms but you must have heard them many times. What made them so special today?

L: As you say, I've always admired the creativity behind this psalm. How each set of verses begins with the next letter of the alphabet starting with aleph, bet and so on. It takes genius to write any acrostic psalm but to produce one with 176 verses is surely an extraordinary accomplishment. **W:** So you've told me before - many times!

L: OK, I get the message - supper! But as you'll hear later, after today these verses have taken on a whole new dimension of meaning for me.

W: Now that we've eaten, perhaps you can explain why I had take the children to see your mother on my own today - she wasn't best pleased!

L: As you know, we were just about to leave when an urgent message came from the Lawyers' Office. I got there to be confronted with the usual panic whenever the daily routine is upset. Apparently a rumour was going round about a 'showdown' between the religious authorities and Jesus from Nazareth. It seemed he'd managed to upset them all. The chairman said everyone else was just too busy and so I would have to make sure the Lawyers' interests were represented. What he really meant, of course, was to join in with the other groups and persecute Jesus with questions.

W: What did you think of that? **L:** I was not happy and in fact was a bit ashamed of myself for agreeing to get involved. **W:** Ashamed? Why? **L:** Well from the look on the chairman's face and the attitude of other lawyers in the room, I got the impression it was some sort of test as to whether I fitted in. Anyway, I set off for the Temple precincts which was where Jesus had been teaching recently. When I got there, things were just as I had suspected. **W:** What happened?

L: The Pharisees began. They asked a question about paying taxes which was really a trap. Hardly pausing, Jesus gave a devastating response. The Sadducees' came next with an absurd riddle about the resurrection. **W:** The hypocrites - they don't even believe in it! **L:** Indeed - and they got the sort of response they deserved. Then it was my turn as a 'typical' lawyer. By this time I was disgusted with the other groups. I decided to ask a question just for me not for anyone else. Whatever I asked, I wasn't going to resort to tricks.

L: And so I asked Jesus a standard lawyer's question: *Which commandment is the first of all?* Now that isn't really a difficult question for anyone with a basic knowledge of the scriptures but his reply astonished me. **W:** Why, what did he say.

L: He gave me a double answer. Each part was unoriginal but putting them together showed amazing insight: **J:** *The first is, Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.* - [that was the easy bit, so to speak]

J: *The second is this, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.* - [again, a well known reply on its own]. This impressed me so much that I had to congratulate him. And then I was astonished by his response: **J:** *You are not far from the kingdom of God.*

W: But what do you think Jesus was implying by linking these two commandments?

L: Well, it could be this, and if I'm right, it's somewhat challenging, to say the least:

Love of God	can't exist without	Love of Neighbour
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AND

Love of Neighbour	can't exist without	Love of God
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W: Why shouldn't you be right? After all, from what I've heard about this man Jesus he doesn't go in for boring statements! And haven't we all occasionally been put to shame by the behaviour of a Gentile who doesn't appear to believe in God but who behaves better than we do! As Isaiah says: '*..my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*'. In fact, adapting your idea we could go further and say this:

Love of God	grows with	Love of Neighbour
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AND

Love of Neighbour	grows with	Love of God
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W: For instance, there was Samuel, old Sam, as the children used to call him. He was renowned for his charitable works. As he got older, instead of relaxing a bit he seemed to be able to take on more and more **L:** Yes, when there was that flood near Damascus, he didn't just organise a relief collection, he insisted on travelling to the district where it was needed so he could report back on how the money was being spent - at his age!

W: And what did you think of this man Jesus? Is he just a teacher or perhaps even a prophet. **L:** Exactly the sort of questions that have been going through my mind! He's certainly a teacher. Today's encounter proved that for me beyond a doubt. Is he also a prophet? Well, at times he's like a prophet but there's something else that I haven't worked out yet. **W:** What do you think will happen to him. **L:** Only time will tell but whatever happens, it may surprise everyone.

Servant Song (Words: Richard Gillard. Tune: Betty Pulkingham)

<p>1. Brother, sister let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you; pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.</p>	<p>2. We are pilgrims on a journey, and companions on the road; we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.</p>
<p>3. I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night-time of your fear; I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.</p>	<p>5. When we sing to God in heaven we shall find such harmony, born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.</p>

In memory of David Mowbray who liked a sermon with a story in it.