

Matthew 22:34-end – Sermon for 8am

Finally, after weeks and weeks of Jesus story-telling and discussion with important members of Jewish society we get to the nub of it all this week – “Which is the Greatest Commandment?” If the whole of life could be crystallised into one little neat package, what would it be? If the whole purpose of our being on this earth is more than just an accident then what is it? Why are we here? What should we do? What kind of people should we be?

And Jesus’ answer sums up the stories, the parables, he has been telling. It finally hammers home the positive response of all the arguments and criticisms he has been voicing. It is the culmination of the last few chapters and the climax of his teaching. It’s like watching a film with several plot-lines which have all come together for this final act. Jesus’ answer is all-encompassing, penetrating into every single one of us and at the same time managing to wrap up the whole of humanity within it.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbour as yourself.

These words strike at the core of every single one of us. They make us feel inadequate because we don’t measure up. They make us feel inspired as we suddenly realise the simplicity of our faith on a foundational level. They excite us that the God of the universe cares about whether we love him. They make us care for each other. They make us care for ourselves. They make us care about what parts of ourselves we keep hidden and locked away from God.

Someone asked me the other day what it looks like to follow these commandments, and I guess it probably looks different for each of us, in the same way that two marriages are not the same, two families are not the same, and two friendships are never the same. Loving God will be different for all of us, so rather than become prescriptive, I’m going to give us time now to reflect and pray. And during this time, I’m going to suggest you use your imaginations.

So firstly, Love the Lord your God with all your heart. Imagine what life would look like and how you would feel if this were true – that every deep-seated emotion was glorifying to God and directed towards him. Perhaps imagine a life not dogged with outbursts of irrational irritation and anger; one set free from jealousy or rivalry; a life liberated from anxiety. What would it look like to be loving God from the centre of our being and orienting all else from there?

Love the Lord your God with all your soul. Imagine what life would look like and how you would feel if this were true – that every breath we have is drawn in in faith and expelled in love. That we linger over the seconds spent in God’s presence and long for a future with him. Imagine a life where we have complete security in God, knowing that he holds us even as we feel decay. What would it look like to be completely safe in God and able to greet others from that safety?

Love the Lord your God with all your mind. Imagine what life would look like and how you would feel if this were true – that every thought, every plan and every striving were directed towards God. That we enjoy studying and praying and getting to know more of God; that we are filled with an insatiable thirst for more and more understanding of God and his creation and that in all we do we

are doing it to further God's Kingdom and to bring him glory. What would it look like for each fleeting thought to be a prayer? What would it look like for each project, each learning, and each discussion to be bathed in God's presence?

Love your neighbour as yourself. Imagine what life would look like and how you would feel if this were true – that just as wash myself and tend to my personal needs each day, I care about others in such a fundamental way; that instead of others getting the leftovers of love, others get the first-fruits of it. What would it look like if I cared for the people I pass on the street to really find out how they are? What would it look like for me to love my enemy? What would it do to my politics? My social life and my bank balance? What would it look like if I cared for others the way God cares for others?

Lord God, help us to love you with every moment of our life, every aspect of our being, every cell of our body, and every thought in our mind. Help us to have the same care for your people as you have for us. Send us out in the power of your spirit to live and work for your praise and glory. Amen.