

“When Time’s Up”  
 Deut. 34:1-12; Matt. 22:34-40  
 October 25, 2020  
 Rev. David Hutchinson

What is the MAIN thing in your life?

Is that a DIFFICULT question to answer? - OR - Is it OBVIOUS?

It’s probably a little different for each one of us.

It seems to me like for MANY PEOPLE the answer should just POP out!

But maybe we STRUGGLE with it a little bit...

A few years ago, a Presbyterian Pastor named Eugene March was writing about what was IMPORTANT for the FUTURE of the PRESBYTERIAN church, and he said,

"The MAIN thing - - is to keep the MAIN THING - - the MAIN THING."

It’s memorable - - as a quote.

But how do we do it?

On a related note - - ask yourself this: How long would someone have to know you - before THEY knew what was MOST important to you? The MAIN thing?

In this morning's Scripture lesson, the Pharisees come together to question Jesus - - - and a LAWYER asks him a question: "Teacher, what is the MAIN THING ?"

Or to put it another way:

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?"

Which one?

Out of all the 613 different laws - - surrounding the 10 commandments - - which one is the GREATEST ONE? / It’s kind of like a confirmation hearing - - for Jesus as a judge.

They question him about the law - - and he points to love.

Jesus points them to TWO commandments about LOVE.

The TWO laws Jesus cites are about love of God, and the love of Neighbor.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your HEART, with all your SOUL, and with all your MIND - - - and you shall love your neighbor - - - as yourself."

So there it is - - the main thing.

But with life the way it is - - I think it is EASY - - to become DISTRACTED. / It is DIFFICULT to remember - - always to FOCUS - - on the MAIN THING.

As we dig in further - - to Jesus' response - - it's interesting to see where his answer comes from. / Jesus has answered by combining TWO Old Testament laws.

These are two pieces - - of the law that originated with Moses.

Moses is the source.

Moses - - who got them from God on the mountain - - according to the Bible.

If you open your Bible to Leviticus 19:18 you get the second one about your neighbor.

And then - - the first part about loving God is from Deuteronomy 6:5.

Of all the things Moses left as his legacy when he died - - these are what Jesus chooses.

To understand HOW important these two laws are look at how they originate:

In a way they are the CULMINATION of the whole Old Testament journey from slavery - - through the wilderness - - up to the receiving of the 10 commandments and the law. / To see it that way - - we have to set them in the context of the history from where they came.

That is the history from the book of Exodus.

We have been reading through the book of Exodus for the last two months. / The journey of these ancient Hebrews - - following Moses - - through the Red Sea - - escaping the bondage of slavery - - wandering in the wilderness - - has all led to this base camp - - near the mountain where Moses went - - to receive the 10 commandments.

They went through all that - - for the 10 commandments!

The golden calf interrupted - - but Moses got them back on track.

God has said over and over: I want to be WITH you!

The WAY for that to work was the 10 commandments.

Put them in the tabernacle - - and they - - and GOD will always be there.

The book of Exodus ENDS - - it CULMINATES - - with the tabernacle and the law.

The book of Exodus that BEGINS with the BIRTH of Moses - - does NOT end with his death. / It ENDS with the LAW. / Moses' death - - is not reported until the end of the book of Deuteronomy. / Deuteronomy is the book of Moses sermons and interpretation of the laws.

Moses' life - - and Moses legacy - - is about the law.

The book of Exodus ends with tabernacle and the law....

It is not until Deuteronomy that Moses dies.

After we read about how Moses interpreted the law.

SO - - when YOUR time's up - - what will you emphasize?

What is the culmination of your life about?

When we hear the phrase "time's up" we often have some reaction.

Time's up at the end of a test means - - answer that last question.

Or - - think of a last word in a debate.

Or - - what you'd grab in a forest fire - -

when time's up and you have to evacuate.

As I think about how I might respond to the call: "time's up", listen to the words of a poem by Billy Collins about the influence of his parents on his life even after they have died:

It's called, "No Time"

“In a rush this weekday morning,  
 I tap the horn as I speed past the cemetery  
 Where my parents are buried  
 Side by side under a smooth slab of granite.  
 Then - - all day long I think of him - - rising up to give me that look  
 Of knowing disapproval  
 While my mother calmly tells him to lie back down.”

Thinking about the end of our lives - - or the lives of loved ones - - can have an interesting effect on us. / We hear the call, “Time’s up” and we take stock - - or re-order things.

So - - as we search for our FOCUS - - on what is MOST IMPORTANT in our lives - - let's return to the commandment Jesus chooses.

The lawyer asks for ONE law - - out of 613. And Jesus picks TWO:

"Love the Lord your God" &

"Love your neighbor - - as yourself"

To help us grasp the POWER of these two central commandments - - picture a CROSS.

The FIRST commandment is the VERTICAL part of the Cross. / Love the lord your God - - with all your heart, soul, and mind. / Stay CONNECTED to God.

The SECOND commandment is the HORIZONTAL part - - love your neighbor as yourself. / Stay connected to each other - - as in an embrace.

Like a TREE - - with ROOTS and BRANCHES. / The ROOTS keeping us CONNECTED to God - - - and the BRANCHES - - reaching OUT. / And like a tree without EITHER roots or branches would DIE - - - so would WE - - without EITHER God - - or each other - - to love.

SO again - - WHAT is the MAIN THING in your LIFE?

What or WHO do you LOVE?

Jesus suggests a number of things to love. / To begin with . . .

How are you at LOVING YOURSELF?

I ask - - because the command that Jesus points to in this morning's Scripture reading - - ENDS right on that question.

Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind - - and you shall love your neighbor - - as you love yourself."

So how do we do - at loving ourselves ?

Can we pick up a mirror - - and stare into our own eyes - - and say,

"How do I love ME - - let me count the ways"?

Or do you look into the mirror and the evil witch in Snow White tells you:

You look terrible!

You're not really good enough...

Mirror, mirror on the wall - - do we lie to ourselves - - or do we love...?

SO how are we at loving ourselves?

Credit for this next part of my sermon goes to Raymond Foster - - a poet whose writing inspired this little section - - and whose poem helped me take the part of Jesus' command about myself - - seriously:

Mirror, mirror on the wall...

I look into my eyes and say, fair enough.

I see ME as a good person - - but I know I don't always do the right thing

I know that when I hurt people it's NOT what I WANT to do.

If I do bad, I know I don't mean it - - so I always try to FORGIVE me.

If I didn't, how could I possibly live with myself?

Because I love myself - - I take PRIDE in what I do well.

And - - I want to IMPROVE myself so I'll be even better.

I take time to practice so I will get even better.

Because I love me - I think that I am RIGHT about most everything.

When someone tells me I am wrong, I look at myself and say,

"self - - are you - or are you not right?" / If I AM wrong - I can admit it.

BUT when I am convinced that I REALLY am right - - I stick up for myself.

I clothe my body - - keep it warm - - I try to look nice.

Because I love me I DON'T GOSSIP about me. I try to show others my best side. When I do tell others about some goof - I make sure it is someone who will understand.

Because I love me - I expose myself to pleasant things - and avoid what is disagreeable.

I hate burnt toast and sour milk.

I love me very much - it's true. I'll admit it.

Should I deny it? What's so bad about it? I show love for ME!

AND - while I am counting the ways I love me - -

- - I am OVERWHELMED - by Jesus' command - -

"Love your NEIGHBOR, in the SAME WAY - - you love yourself."

Once we have loved ourselves - - we can move on to loving others.

The KEY - - is NOT to STOP - - with ourselves.

But it IS - I think - where we have to BEGIN.

SO - - as I said... credit for that goes to Raymond Foster.

But, now that we have begun - - let's NOT stop here - - simply loving ourselves - - but move on to loving our neighbors - - which also includes - - being OPEN to our neighbors - - - so that they might love us.

Our neighbors - - that is - - all the people around us - - other people are MORE than just people to BE THERE to love when we want them.

In order to love - - and to be loved - - don't we have to be OPEN to our neighbors - - to ALLOW ourselves to be LOVED - - and to love?

When we do this we've moved - - the NEXT STEP - - beyond JUST loving ourselves.

BUT - - now - - if you've MOVED this NEXT STEP with me - - - come take the FINAL STEP - - and imagine all those OTHER PEOPLE who mean so much to you - - - - and ask yourself the question Jesus asked Simon Peter at the end of John's Gospel, Chapter 21,

"Do you love me MORE than these

How much do we love God ?

Do we love God with ALL our HEART, SOUL, and MIND?

Imagine your CHILDREN.

Your PARENTS.

Your SPOUSE.

Jesus asks, "Do you love me MORE than these?"

It's a question - - NOT meant to DIMINISH our love for those dear to us - - - but RATHER - - to call us to a GREATER love of God.

And to really love God with our whole selves - - could change the world.

It could change - - everything.

I remember when my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, and we were afraid for her. / She went through chemotherapy, and surgery. / And she survived for decades after that.

But - - I saw the ROCK of our family - - become WEAK - - and I thought about what life would be like without her - - - I had to ask myself - - was my life focused on the MAIN THING?

And how much do I really love God?

In all circumstances...?

What is God, and Christ - - if not love.

Love - - which claims our whole HEART - and SOUL - and MIND.

Love SO much the - - MAIN THING - - to us - - that there is nothing ELSE.

When Moses' time on earth was up - - he left us the law.

And contained within the law - - were the seeds of the greatest love ever.

Not a bad legacy.