

Adult Faith Formation

Matthew 22:34-46

Read the assigned reading, then read all of Chapter 22 to get a sense of the context.

A few notes:

- 1) Jesus is now in Jerusalem having entered on a donkey to loud acclaim. This is only days before he is betrayed and tried and killed.
- 2) Verse 15 indicates that the Pharisees and Sadducees and other Temple leaders are plotting to trap Jesus. This questions about the greatest commandment is part of trying to trap him. Jesus ends the barrage by asking the Pharisees a question which silences them for now...
- 3) The traditional number of commandments in later rabbinic literature, around the time of Jesus, was 613. Several rabbis attempted to epitomize the law as Jesus does here. Other summaries suggested are Micah 6:8, Isaiah 33:15-16; 56:1; Amos 5:14-15.
- 4) See Deuteronomy 6:4-5 This is the Shema, the basic affirmation of Jewish faith which Jews are instructed to recite twice daily.
 - a. In ancient Jewish understanding the heart is the center of intellect and will. Soul is understood as one's selfhood. Might is understood as one's capacity.
- 5) The piece about loving neighbors is taken from Leviticus 19:18. The understanding here is not an emotional love but rather action, reaching out or befriending. "As yourself" is to say that the neighbor is like you because he/she is also made in the image of God.ⁱ ⁱⁱ

Thoughts:

- 1) You've probably read this story before. Perhaps the version from Luke (which leads into the parable of the Good Samaritan) is more familiar to you. Try to have a "beginner's mind" about this story. Read with curiosity. What questions come up?
- 2) Challenge yourself to recite the Shema twice a day. The full Shema: Hear, O Israel, the Lord your 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 might." Maybe you also want to add the second piece that Jesus adds as well. What is it like to remember these words in this way twice a day? Do you see a change in your mindset or behavior?
- 3) Consider each of the questions or challenges that the Jewish authorities pose to Jesus in Matthew 22. What aspects of life do they cover? Why might these be so important to them?

ⁱ The New Interpreter's Study Bible, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN. 2003

ⁱⁱ The Harper Collins Study Bible, Harper Collins Press, New York, NY. 1993