

Dear Friends,

Mark 12: 28-34

What does God want you to be? What does God want you to do?

Moses and his people have nearly reached Mount Sinai. There God will give the commandments. These will make clear to the people what God requires. They will reveal the way that, if lived, will make life good for everyone.

God's instructions will include The Ten Commandments, but there will also be many other rules and regulations. It has been calculated that in this section of the Bible there are 365 prohibitions; we could call them "Thou shalt nots". And there are 248 positive demands or "Thou shalt". That's a lot of teaching. In the years that followed people studied these laws. They tried to work out which were of more and which of less importance. They discussed whether there were some that outweighed all of the others? They longed to find a bite sized summary that people could carry with them?

By the time of Jesus, the discussion was still raging. One Jewish man was genuinely trying to find out what God required. He heard Jesus disputing with others. He was impressed and wondered if Jesus might have the answers he was seeking. So, he asked him "Which commandment is the first of all?" He wanted to know which was the most important commandment, was there one which held together all of the others?

Jesus was used to questions. Quite often those who asked them were setting traps. They were trying to trip him up. He would frequently answer them with questions of his own. It was a good way of debating. But in this man, he sees someone who is genuine. The man is not trying to win points over him. He has a real question and wants a real answer. So, Jesus, on this occasion, does not respond with a question, instead he gives an answer. When Jesus finishes speaking, the man expresses his agreement with what Jesus has said. The man then also adds a few words of his own. Jesus in his turn recognises that the man has shown wisdom. Jesus puts his own appreciation of him into words.

The picture we are given is not of an argument, but of two people speaking honestly and seriously. They are open and trusting, ready to listen and to learn. It's a meeting of minds where the hearts of two people reach out to each other. And it brings all the talk, all the debating to an end. Those who are watching observe them together and know that there is no more to say. The story ends with the words "After this no one dared to ask him any question."

May we come to Jesus with open, trusting, and sincere hearts. May we listen to him as he tells us what it means for God's will to be done in us.

God bless you,
Tony