

Dear Friends,

Mark 12: 28-31

Jesus has been asked which commandment holds together all the others. He answers with not one but two commands. "You shall love the Lord your God" and "You shall love your neighbour as yourself". Let's look at the second of those commands and then at how the two intermingle.

What does the "As yourself" bit mean? Most likely it means that you are to show the same attention and care to others that you give to yourself. You do what is necessary so that you survive and are happy. As you act for your own well-being so you are called to act for the welfare of others.

The commandment has also been interpreted as acknowledging the importance of having a proper love for yourself. It accepts that it is right for you to know and meet your own needs. The commandment has been seen in this way from the earliest days of the Christian Church. Augustine of Hippo, for example, saw it as a justification for appropriate self-love.

The commandment could also be translated. "You shall love your neighbour they are like you". The idea then is that you recognise that other people are just like you. We all long to be accepted and be given a bit of attention. We can all be a bit muddled and messed up at times. We all need forgiveness. Therefore, show some understanding and compassion towards others. They are just like you. We are all just people standing in front of other people asking them to love us. (Get in touch if you recognise the reference in that last sentence.)

And the two commandments, to love God and to love others, belong together. Jesus moves between them without missing a beat or pausing for breath. He wasn't saying anything new. Philo lived at about the same time as Jesus. He called people to "Duty to God as shown by piety and holiness and duty to people as shown by humanity and justice". This thinking was in tune with The Ten Commandments which also set out our responsibilities towards both God and people.

The two belong together and they are also intermingled. You obey the command to love God by obeying the command to love your neighbour. In the first epistle of John the writer says, "Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this; those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also". Jesus says that when you feed the hungry; give a drink to the thirsty; welcome the stranger; clothe the naked; visit those who are sick or in prison, when you do all this to others, you do it to him. You are called to love God. You do that when you love your fellow human being.

On the other hand, as Fran from St Luke's reminded me "You can only love your neighbour because God has filled you with His love". She gave me this quote from Paul's writings. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit

who has been given to us". Or as John says in one of his letters "We love because God first loved us".

You may live with the confidence that you are loved by God. God's love is flowing towards you and being poured into your heart. You are surrounded by it, enfolded in it and filled with it. That empowers you to become all love, loving God with your heart, soul, mind and strength and loving your neighbour as you love yourself.

God bless you,

Tony