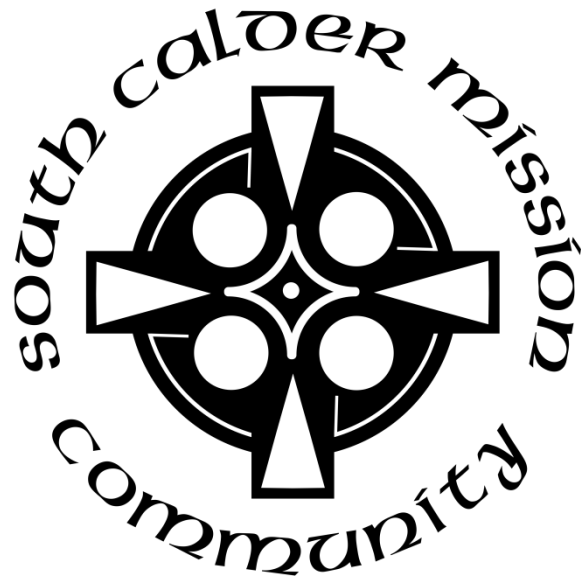


Into his Courts with Praise...



A Service of the Word

Sunday 25 October 2023
Twenty first Sunday after Trinity.

A Service of the Word for Sunday morning

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INTRODUCTION

"You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

Matthew 22:39.



THE CONFESSION

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all.
Though we have grieved him, yet he will heal us if we confess our
sins in penitence and faith.

**Almighty God,
I confess that I have sinned against you
in thought, word and deed;
I have not loved you with all my heart;
I have not loved my neighbours as myself.
Have mercy upon me,
cleanse me from my sins,
and help me to overcome my faults,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Receive God's forgiveness

May the Father forgive us
By the death of His Son
And strengthen us
To live in the power of the Spirit
All our days. **Amen.**

PRAISE

O Lord, open my lips...
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
Give me the joy of your saving help...
and sustain me with your life-giving Spirit.

THE COLLECT

Merciful God, teach us to be faithful in change and uncertainty,
that trusting in your word and obeying your will we may enter the unfailing
joy of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

*Suggested hymn to sing or read **Before the throne of God above.***

THE WORD OF GOD.

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to all the congregation of the Israelites and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.

"You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand idly by when the blood of your neighbour is at stake: I am the Lord.

"You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord.

Psalm 1

Blessed are they who have not walked
in the counsel of the wicked, ♦
nor lingered in the way of sinners,
nor sat in the assembly of the scornful.
Their delight is in the law of the Lord ♦
and they meditate on his law day and night.
Like a tree planted by streams of water
bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither, ♦
whatever they do, it shall prosper.
As for the wicked, it is not so with them; ♦
they are like chaff which the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked shall not be able to stand in the judgement, ♦
nor the sinner in the congregation of the righteous.
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, ♦
but the way of the wicked shall perish.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and been shamefully maltreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts.

As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.

So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

Suggested hymn to sing or read **Seek ye first.**

GOSPEL

Matthew 22: 34-end

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, ' "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: 'What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?' They said to him, 'The son of David.' He said to them, 'How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

"The Lord said to my Lord,
'Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet' "?

If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?' No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

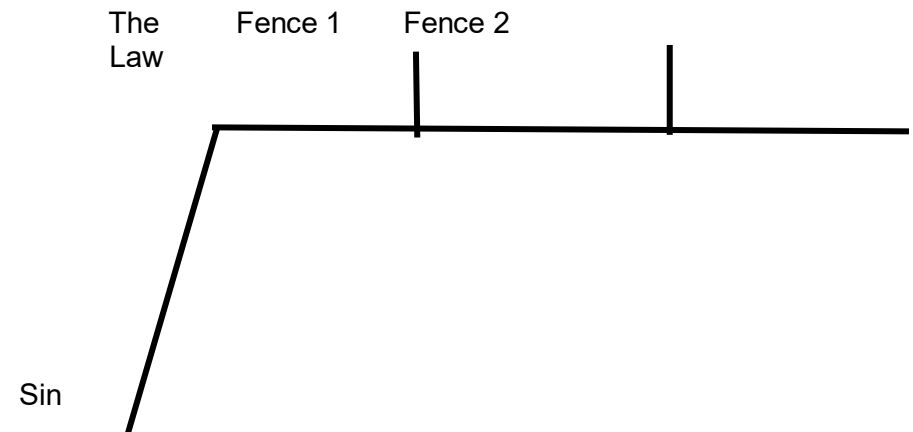
REFLECTION – Two commandments or many?

Jesus was fond of asking questions people couldn't answer – it was a way of stopping **them** asking **him** trick questions, and trying to catch him out. The second half of today's gospel reading comes at the end of a long section in which both Sadducees and Pharisees have been questioning Jesus. Eventually he responds by asking whose descendant the Christ, the Messiah, will be? They give the standard answer, that he will be the descendant of King David. Jesus then quotes from Psalm 110, in which David seems to be calling the Messiah 'Lord.' If David calls him 'Lord' how can he be the son of David? With our knowledge of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we might want to say that humanly speaking he can be the descendant of David, but that he is also Son of God and therefore

greater than David. But the Pharisees whom Jesus addresses can't respond, and we are told,
'From that day on, no-one dared to ask him any more questions.'

Now both Sadducees and Pharisees crop up from time to time in the gospels, usually challenging Jesus or trying to catch him out, and are often mentioned together. However, they were actually very different groups of people, whose concerns were also very different. The Sadducees were part of the Jerusalem establishment, closely allied with the chief priests and keen to keep in with the Romans, who gave the Jewish authorities a fair amount of freedom, provided that taxes were paid and peace maintained. One peculiarity of the Sadducees was that they only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament as being scripture. This had the consequence that they did not believe in resurrection of the dead, as it was not provided for by these books. When these people challenge Jesus, it is because they are afraid he will 'rock the boat' and catch the attention of the Romans. He claims to be serving a higher authority than either Jerusalem or Rome, and this would make him dangerous.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, were lay men whose primary aim was that people should obey God's law, the Law of Moses. They argued that every person should obey every detail of this Law. But what if, by neglect or misunderstanding, someone **did** cross that line? How could this be prevented? The way the Pharisees dealt with this was to produce a lot more rules, which if obeyed would stop a person getting close to breaking the main Law. It has sometimes been presented like this:



Imagine the Law of Moses as being like the top of a cliff: if you sin, you fall over the cliff. So how to stop people falling? You build a fence a little way back from the cliff to keep them away from the edge. This represents the additional rules created by the Pharisees: keep **these** rules and you won't get near breaking the main ones. In fact, by the time of Jesus, they had produced even more detailed rules, represented by the second fence, to make sure even the first fence was not crossed. We can see from this why Jesus accused the Pharisees of 'putting loads on people's shoulders but not helping them to carry them.'

A classic example: The Law says, 'Do not cook a kid (young goat) in its mother's milk.' We don't know why this was important, but it must have been, because it comes twice in Exodus and again in Deuteronomy. But what if someone got confused about where the milk had come from? They might inadvertently cook a kid in its mother's milk. So the Pharisees added a rule: never cook a kid in milk. That's fence 1. But what if someone didn't clean a pan out properly, leaving a spot of goat's milk in it. And what if the next time that pan was used, a kid was cooked in it, and the spot of milk happened to be from its mother? So an extra rule was added: have separate pans for dairy and meat, then it can't happen. That's fence 2.

Now Jesus did not neglect the Law, but he was more concerned with the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law. He has no time for all the extra rules promoted by the Pharisees. In today's reading, and elsewhere, he upholds the broader commandments from which some of the more detailed ones are derived. When asked by a Pharisee, 'Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' he responds with: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' (*Deuteronomy 6: 5*)

He follows this with the second greatest:

'Love your neighbour as yourself.' (*Leviticus 19: 18*)

Notice how both these begin with the word 'love' without going into any detail about exactly what behaviour constitutes love: that is something we need to work out for ourselves. In fact most of these more general commands leave us having to decide in our own situation.

In fact, for us, in a modern democratic country many years after the time of the Pharisees, most of the more detailed laws would be difficult if not impossible for us to apply. Quite simply, we live in a different world, and it is the spirit of the Law which we have to interpret in our own time and

place. Take for example the command to love your neighbour: as a man asks Jesus just before he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, '**Who is my neighbour?**' One of the early Gospel Musicals, 'A Man Dies,' some years before Jesus Christ Superstar, puts it like this:

'Who is my neighbour, please tell me do.
Who is my neighbour, what say you?
I love my mum: will that do, chum,
what more do you want?'

In the case of the Good Samaritan, the neighbour was a stranger who needed help. In today's world, our neighbour is not just the person who lives nearby, or whom we meet socially or at work. Modern communications mean that we are aware of needs from all around the world – so great and so many that we could not, as individuals, hope to deal with them, but neither can we ignore them. How can we, prayerfully, decide where we can help; by donating money, by taking political action, by getting involved in local charities or campaign groups? By receiving regular information from charities or missions and upholding them in prayer? At a time when we are in danger of information overload, we must each decide where and how we can help, which of our many neighbours we can most benefit. (And not forgetting those who **do** live nearby, who also have their needs and problems.)

And then there is that 'first commandment', to love the Lord our God. This will include personal devotion, and seeking his will in all things, but surely one of the ways we can show our love for God is by obeying that other command, to love our neighbour, whom God the Father also loves. In all of this, Pharisee-type rules will not help us. We need to be seeking a Spirit-led way of love: love which is not based upon feelings, but upon wanting the best for the other person.

So don't worry which saucepan to use when you cook your lunch: go for the bigger picture, and the greater commandments.

Jonathan Falkner

Suggested hymn to sing or read **O God, you search me and you know me.**

THE CREED

All I believe in God the Father,
whose loving care is the pattern for family life.
I believe in Jesus, the Son of God,
who lives in my heart through faith,
and fills me with his love.
I believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens me with power from on high.
I believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.



THE PRAYERS

A time of quiet prayer for

- *The universal Church - Bishops, synods and all leaders church*
- *The leaders of the nations*
- *The natural world and the resources of the earth*

Loving God I see the news and I am afraid. Violence is spiralling out of control. I don't know what to think or feel. The temptation to fall into hatred, or despair feels very close at hand.

Help me to remember that nothing in all creation can separate me from your love that I know in Jesus. May your perfect love for me cast out my fear and free me to discern what is mine to do amidst the chaos of this suffering world.

Amen.

The Methodist Church.

Finishing with the South Calder Mission Community prayer...

Heavenly Father we thank you for the life of your Church in this place, and in all the villages of the South Calder Mission Community;
for all who have served and worshipped you in years gone by,
for all who make up your family in our churches today,
for the faith we have in common, and for the people and traditions which make each church unique.
By your Spirit, guide and equip us,
that together we might find new ways
to reach out to our local community,
to show your love to our neighbours,
and to encourage them
to follow the Lord Jesus in their lives.
Father, we offer ourselves to your service,
In the unity of the Holy Spirit,
And in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

and the Lord's prayer...

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

THE CONCLUSION

Suggested hymn to sing or read **Lord, make me a mountain.**

The following prayer is said

**Be with me, Lord, as I finish my prayer today.
May my lips always speak the truth;
may my eyes which have read your word
see only what is good;
and may my life as well as my worship
be always pleasing in your sight,
for the glory of your name. Amen.**

And now may the Lord who brought us to birth by his Spirit,
strengthen us for the Christian life.
May the Lord who provides for all our needs
sustain us day by day.
May the Lord whose steadfast love is constant as a mother's care,
send us out to live and work for others.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with us and remain with us always.
Amen.

So now may I go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Links for the hymns

Before the throne of God above.

<https://youtu.be/UqdUmJ4P5f0>

Seek ye first.

<https://youtu.be/FFxZeY2D5tc>

O God, you search me and you know me.

<https://youtu.be/XST5DCIHh6c>

Lord, make me a mountain.

https://youtu.be/NN_OYOHbafs