

Scripture Reading(s):

Mark 12:28-34 Common English Bible (CEB)

God's most important command

28 One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"

29 Jesus replied, "The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, 30 and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. 31 The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these."

32 The legal expert said to him, "Well said, Teacher. You have truthfully said that God is one and there is no other besides him. 33 And to love God with all of the heart, a full understanding, and all of one's strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more important than all kinds of entirely burned offerings and sacrifices."

34 When Jesus saw that he had answered with wisdom, he said to him, "You aren't far from God's kingdom." After that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

2 Timothy 1:1-7 Common English Bible (CEB)

2 To Timothy, my dear child.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
Thanksgiving and prayer

3 I'm grateful to God, whom I serve with a good conscience as my ancestors did. I constantly remember you in my prayers day and night.

4 When I remember your tears, I long to see you so that I can be filled with happiness.

5 I'm reminded of your authentic faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice. I'm sure that this faith is also inside you.

6 Because of this, I'm reminding you to revive God's gift that is in you through the laying on of my hands.

7 God didn't give us a spirit that is timid but one that is powerful, loving, and self-controlled.

The line that spoke to me clearly last night from these readings is “God didn’t give us a spirit that is timid, but one that is powerful, loving, and self-controlled”

In this time and place in the story of the world, we need to remember that God’s gift to us is a strong, powerful and loving spirit. We need to harness that gift to make the world a better place.

Scholars have identified that this second letter attributed from Paul to Timothy was possibly written when Paul is in prison in Rome, abandoned by many of his friends and facing imminent death. Once again, Paul speaks out about the power of faith even in times of trouble and suffering.

In his letter, Paul gives examples of a powerful and loving spirit that is bold and strong in the face of violence. His voice encourages all Followers of the Way of Jesus to similar boldness.

Paul reminds this church leader that through the stories of faith that was passed to him through parents and grandparents, Timothy has within himself something that is to be shared with the world to remind followers of the strength of faith and of God guiding decisions.

The Pauline letters do not reflect upon what is needed for Paul. They remind the readers of the need to be caring for others, to put oneself last – not first, to be brave in speaking out against tyranny, violence and discrimination.

Be bold. Know your power. Be loving.

Jesus said... Love God. Love your neighbour. Everything else hinges on these two. In the part of the conversation we hear today Jesus said that the actions of love are more important than making loud noises about sacrifice.

This, too, is a story that was created in conflict because Jesus was constantly being challenged. The church leaders... priests, scribes and elders... questioned his authority because he called them out for hypocrisy, for getting more involved in rules and regulations than in caring for people. Pharisees and Herodians tried to trap him with questions about allegiance to God or State. Yet, with boldness, with the power of great faith, he continued to speak the word of God even though it put him in opposition to the Government of the land and the church.

We are living in a world of violence, of turmoil, of challenge. For the most part, in this community, we have not had personal experience of this. However, all we need to do is turn on the news and we must be very aware of how dangerous it is to be a true follower of the Way of Jesus, the Love of God.

If we are going to live our faith, we must be bold in speaking out against those who want to trample on the rights of the vulnerable, the weak. We must be bold in offering

hospitality to those in need. We must be bold in calling out those who would gain power for themselves by belittling others, by offering lies, by looking after themselves first and leaving others without food, shelter or care.

Today we are honouring All Saints day. A day in the life of the church when we stop to give thanks for those who have been bold, who have been faithful in the face of terror or violence, who have given us examples of courage and strength that offers hope in the midst of despair, who have passed on stories of loving God and loving neighbours that should inspire us to be more than voyeurs of the world around us.

Today we think of those who stand up for justice for all people.

The Scribe, listening to the words of Jesus, realized that following this Way of God's love was the best and only way to be. "To love God with all of the heart, a full understanding, and all of one's strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself is much more important than all kinds of sacrifices"

From our "Song of Faith" we have the words of action of our faith: "God calls us to be doers of the word and not hearers only"

We are not loving our neighbour when we won't feed them, or clothe them, or offer them welcome. We are not loving our neighbour when we fight about 'Merry Christmas' over 'Happy Holiday' ... offer either or both... but do it with love and respect. We cannot call ourselves followers of Jesus when we don't treat others as we would want to be treated.

We don't have to be rude, we just have to be bold in saying that lies and discrimination are not acceptable. We can say "I disagree." We can say "if we were in that same position how would we hope the world would respond".

Let's be that world. Let's be doers in God's world that reflect care and compassion to God's people and God's world. Let's use the gift of a bold, powerful and loving spirit to bring the world back to partnerships, to community responsibilities, to honesty and integrity, to faith.

Listen to the stories of those who used that Spirit Gift to make the world a better, safer more loving place. Hear the voice of God calling us to do something to bring love back into the world.

God calls us to be doers. Jesus said Love our Neighbour.

God gives us the powerful, loving spirit to succeed.

Let's be God's people of compassionate power in the world. Amen.