

“Final Thoughts...”
Matthew 10:24-39
6/21/2026
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²⁴ "Disciples aren't greater than their teacher, and slaves aren't greater than their master. ²⁵ It's enough for disciples to be like their teacher and slaves like their master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, it's certain that they will call the members of his household by even worse names.

²⁶ "Therefore, don't be afraid of those people because nothing is hidden that won't be revealed, and nothing secret that won't be brought out into the open. ²⁷ What I say to you in the darkness, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, announce from the rooftops. ²⁸ Don't be afraid of those who kill the body but can't kill the soul. Instead, be afraid of the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

– Matthew 10:24-39

Over the years,
I have heard about a couple notable “final sermons”
That my United Methodist clergy colleagues have delivered
From them pulpit on their final Sundays
For some,
Their appointment ended earlier than expected –
Before the next Sunday

Oh, the stories I could tell.

Did you know that this is my final sermon
as an Elder in active service
Are you squirming in your seats?
What has Tony been holding back,
Not just for six years
But for forty years?

There's this little book that I found years ago,
That I have given as a gift to the clergy I've mentored
Those for whom my hand was one of the hands on their head
At their ordination

It's *The Pastor's Unauthorized Instruction Book*

There's a lot of good stuff in these pages.

Let's see...

46 Smile when you have to preach a negative sermon

47 Never use your last sermon to settle the score. It won't.

Well, so much

for trying to settle the score for four decades of ministry

Well, what do I say now?

Three points,

And a little more

Love God with all you've got.

As I reflected in conversations last week about my ministry,

My personal relationship with Jesus and God

Has been the crucial foundation in my ministry

Earlier in my ministry when I was a spiritual formation whiz kid

That is what I learned and taught

around our North Central Jurisdiction and the country

It allowed me to provide ministry in places

where my predecessors had been unable to do so

And it set up my reputation and ministry I was sent to do

for most of the congregations I served after that

Love God with all you've got.

If you need a proof text,

³⁵ One of them, a legal expert, tested him. ³⁶ "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ He replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

– Matthew 22:35-40

Which sets up the second point,
Love your neighbor

Now, if you're thinking right now,
Now wait, we've heard that before...
A couple of times

Well, think about that joke I've told a couple of times here
About that prized pastor who kept on repeating his first sermon
And said he'd keep on repeating that first sermon
Until the congregation was living it out

Love your neighbor

If you remember Luke's version of the story,
The legal expert, the scribe, asks,
And who is my neighbor?

– Luke 10:29b

And Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan

So, yeah, the neighbors we are to love
Are especially those who are on the
other side of tracks
other side of human-made boundaries
other side of political divides
I could go on, right?

Over the decades this has been reflected in my community work
And ministry to and with law enforcement, and jail ministry
You know, the working for the transformation of the world stuff

Two points of the three points...
Which one is next?

We heard The Great Commandment
Love God with all we got
Love our neighbor as we love ourselves

Oh, yeah, that New Commandment Jesus gave to his disciples
In the last hours of his life...

³⁴ "I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. ³⁵ This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other."
– John 13:34-35

Don't just love your neighbor as you love yourself,
But love each other just as much as Jesus loves them

Nothing new, right?

And here's the thing...
It's not just the pastor's job to do this
(yeah, pastors need to do this, too)
It is the mission and command for all of us to do

³⁵ This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other."
If you remember nothing else from today,
Remember this...

What allows us to live out
The Great Commandment (and the second one that's like it)
The New Commandment Jesus added for his disciples?
Is this...

²⁹ Aren't two sparrows sold for a small coin? But not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father knowing about it already.
³⁰ Even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ Don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.

– Matthew 10:29-31

We can live this abundant, glorious way of living
That, don't forget, has eternal implications
Because God loves us – God loved us first!
And we know that we are worthy in his sight

Let me end this final sermon of mine with the final words
Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his last letter to them.

*¹¹ Finally, brothers and sisters, good-bye. Put things in order,
respond to my encouragement, be in harmony with each other, and
live in peace—and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Say
hello to each other with a holy kiss. All of God's people say hello to
you. ¹³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

— 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Let us sing of our love of God
and our covenant with God that you and I have here
in our Wesleyan tradition

(Response Hymn “Covenant Prayer” # 3115)