

**Morning Prayer**  
**18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**The First Lesson: Deuteronomy 5:1-21**

1 And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. 2 The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. 3 The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day. 4 The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire, 5 (I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to shew you the word of the LORD: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount;) saying,

6 “I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. 7 Thou shalt have none other gods before me. 8 Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: 9 Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, 10 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments. 11 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. 12 Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee. 13 Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: 14 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. 15 And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day. 16 “Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. 17 Thou shalt not kill. 18 Neither shalt thou commit adultery. 19 Neither shalt thou steal. 20 Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour. 21 Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour’s wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour’s house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is thy neighbour’s.”

## **The Second Lesson: St. Matthew 22:34-45**

34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. 35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, 36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. 41 “While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42 saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. 43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, 44 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? 45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? 46 And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.”

### **Introduction**

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, best known by his pen name Mark Twain, was an American writer, humorist, entrepreneur, publisher, and lecturer. He was known for his sense of morality and fairness. While a Presbyterian, he was often critical of organized religion and what he perceived as insincere motives and hypocrisy, especially during the civil unrest and political chaos of the late 1800's.

One anecdote attributed to Twain involved an interaction with a certain businessman who was known for his ruthlessness and arrogance. It is alleged that he once made a vow in Twain's presence. “Before I die”, he declared, “I mean to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I will climb Mount Sinai and read the Ten Commandments out loud from the top of the mountain.”

Twain turned to him and said, “I have a better idea. You could just stay home in Boston and work on keeping them.”

### **Jesus is questioned by the Pharisees who try to trick him into giving an answer they can exploit. (v. 34-40)**

In our second lesson for today, a question is put to Jesus by an expert in the law from the group of Pharisees.

“Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”

Jesus knew that the question was not an honest attempt to learn, but rather, the expert was trying to get Jesus to say something that defied Mosaic law or created an argument. Jesus states to them:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

St. Augustine was an early theologian and many of his written works have shaped the practice of biblical interpretation and formed our understanding of Christianity. Of all the texts that can bring clarity, Augustine thinks that Jesus’ statement in this verse of Matthew is the most important, because it shows us how Jesus himself interpreted Scripture. In his work *Christian Doctrine*, Augustine argues that these two commandments should be our lens when interpreting scripture. His stance is that Christ measures his own interpretation of every passage by whether it produces a love of God and love of neighbor. Augustine argues that we should follow Christ by interpreting Scripture in the same way. Augustine believes that Christ’s quotation of these two commandments stands in line with God’s desire that we love Him above all creaturely things. When we love God in this way (with all our heart, soul, and mind) he states, we do not leave room to love something else as our highest good. Augustine further argued that the love of God does not detract from how we love our neighbor but defines precisely how we are to love our neighbor. “God is to be loved on God’s account, and one’s neighbor on God’s account.” We love our neighbor precisely by loving God above all things because our love for God bears witness to our neighbor that they should love God in the same manner.

We will know that our interpretation of a passage is acceptable when this interpretation prompts us to have a deeper love for God and a fuller love for our neighbor. Augustine says, “So anyone who thinks that he has understood the divine scriptures or any part of them but cannot by his understanding build up this double love of God and neighbor, has not yet succeeded in understanding them.”

## **Action**

Let’s put the thoughts of Augustine about interpreting and understanding scripture into practice and look at our first lesson from today.

As we consider our first lesson from Deuteronomy, we find a list of all the commandments God has commanded us to obey. As we read them, we can clearly see how obeying them builds on the double love of God and neighbor.

When we honor and love God, we are commanded to obey and live our lives with these Ten commandments as a guide to how we must act and behave. When we honor and love God, we do not take His name in vain. When we honor and love God, we keep Holy the Sabbath day, and we keep the house of the Lord in order. When we love our neighbor as ourselves, we see how the other commandments are a natural extension of this love. We as parents, would appreciate and love our children to honor us. We in turn should honor our own parents. We do not want someone to harm us physically or have our spouse commit adultery, just as we should not sin in this manner in our own lives. We would not appreciate if someone took our possessions from us, have lies or false truths be spread about us or our families, or have someone be jealous of what we have or have accomplished. To truly love our neighbor means treating them with respect, grace, and forgiveness.

God has commanded us to love and treat each other in the same manner we love and treat ourselves. While easy to say and understand, with our sinful and fallen nature it is impossible to do by ourselves. In our judgmental and fallen world there is much hate, prejudice, and in our society, we often strive to value and encourage revenge, personal attacks, and vanity. In such an environment, looking out for number one, keeping others at a distance, and holding onto anger might appear to be a way to navigate the world. However, Jesus tells us to love and pray for our enemies, to turn the other cheek and to forgive others just as God has forgiven us. Once again this is impossible to do on our own, as we strive to be like Christ. The good news is we do not have to do it by ourselves. We have a Savior who will help us, forgive us when we fall short, inspire us through scripture and keep us moving forward.

## **Conclusion**

When asked, Jesus teaches the lawyer which of the commandments is the greatest. He tells him it is to love God with all you are and with everything you have and to love your neighbor as yourself. The biggest sins we have are those that go against the commandments Jesus refers to in our Gospel reading today. Together we have failed to keep them. We have failed to love God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind. We have also failed to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. The Holy Spirit is still with us and is still guiding us. He is guiding us to

love. When we love God and love our neighbors we are glorifying and honoring God.

Augustine believed that our Lord's statements about the two great commandments presents a clear understanding of how Jesus interpreted Holy Scripture. We should also look at God's word through the lens of Christ's statement and interpret scripture by seeking if it produces the love of God and love of our neighbor. From Augustine's perspective, this is in line with the Apostle Paul's description of "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6) We hear God's word through the lens of our faith in Christ when we see it in light of God's love.

When you hear the commandments of God ask yourself, "How do I fall short with what God has asked of me? Do I love God with all my heart, soul, and mind? How can I love my neighbor as myself?" When reading scripture do I look for how it represents God's love and love for others? Look within yourself, ask the Holy Spirit for guidance, and focus on loving God and loving all the neighbors in your life.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. AMEN