

“From the House of David”

21st Sunday after Pentecost

October 25, 2020

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Iao United Church of Christ

1st Thessalonians 2:1-8

Matthew 22:34-46

Poem: “Shema” by an Anonymous Submission, translated by Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann

“You who live secure

In your warm houses

Who return at evening to find

Hot food and friendly faces:

Consider whether this is a man,

Who labours in the mud

Who knows no peace

Who fights for a crust of bread

Who dies at a yes or a no.

Consider whether this is a woman,

Without hair or name

With no more strength to remember

Eyes empty and womb cold

As a frog in winter.

Consider that this has been:

I commend these words to you.

Engrave them on your hearts

When you are in your house, when you walk on your way

When you go to bed, when you rise.

Repeat them to your children.

Or may your house crumble,

Disease render you powerless,

Your offspring avert their faces from you.”

Isidor Isaac Rabi, a Nobel Prize winner in Physics, and one of the developers of the atomic bomb, was once asked how he became a scientist. Rabi replied that every day after school his mother would talk to him about his school day. She wasn't so much interested in what he had learned that day, but how he conducted himself in his studies. She always inquired, "Did you ask a good question today?"

“Asking good questions,” Rabi said, “made me become a scientist.”

Asking questions is human nature. We are curious and inquisitive beings. We want to know the “how things work” in science, nature and in life itself. Things that cannot be answered by science we leave it to “it is God’s will.” This is how science and religion or faith work together in a delicate balance or a synchronized dance with one another. Beloveds, part of asking questions is that we must be open to truth. Recalling from last week about “truth telling.” Part of the process of finding an answer, we come to a point where we may not like the answer, the truth that we find in the end or possibly this truth makes us feel uncomfortable.

In today’s reading, once again the Pharisees come to Jesus with a question that they already know the answer. What is behind this question is not for seeking any truth but to damage the reputation of Jesus. Question that is set up to cause injury – not for any “really want to know” type of a purpose. So, once again, they begin with – “Teacher.” Recalling from last week’s message, if they were really serious about the teachings of Jesus, they wouldn’t just be interested in the words he used, but would also be interested in his actions – feeding the hungry, healing the sick, caring for the poor, reaching out to women as included, the lame can now walk, the outsiders now feel included. As the song goes that

we have been singing these past few weeks – “Draw the circle wide” type of action. The actions of Jesus should have spoken loud and clear and yet, once again, here they were – asking a question to which they already knew the answer. In the time of Jesus, many in the Jewish faith could recite the Shema by heart. We find it in Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all Your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” This prayer was and is recited twice a day. The prayer is followed up with these instructions. “Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Beloved community, this is how important this prayer is to the Jewish community. This prayer is like our own prayer as Iao Church. We all know this prayer and we must recite it to our children, grandchildren, recite at home or away. Write it on our hands, fix it as an emblem on our foreheads and write it on our doorposts of our houses and gates. “We are a people of God, living and sharing the love of Christ, and reflecting that love in words and actions.”

You see beloved community, these leaders knew Jesus could recite the greatest commandment in the law, but again, the question was only a trap. Is Jesus in it for himself or is he truly following the traditions and lineage of his ancestors? Is he really part of the lineage of David? Well, lets see and put him to a test. Many of us come with our own family lineage, with our own traditions, faith beliefs, expectations, etc. I do not know about you beloved community, but I am glad Jesus was asked this question. It is good because now, there should

not be any doubt in anyone's mind, or any hesitation, any question, no ambiguity about how we are to treat one another in our humanity. No question left unanswered in how we are to treat one another as children of God. "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 – (here we go church) – this is the greatest and first commandment." Can you imagine beloved church, once again, the tension that the Pharisees have created? Imagine what could have been going on in their minds up to this point? "Wait a minute here! 'and the first commandment?' There is more to the greatest commandment?" Jesus goes on with – "And a second is like it:" "Ok, ok, hold on Jesus – what do you mean 'a second' and what else can be similar to loving our God?" "And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" "Wait, what Jesus? My neighbor? You mean the people that live right next door to me? Beloved church, beloved virtual world – many of us probably grew up thinking that the concept of "neighbor" only meant people or community that can be seen right next to us. Today's scripture reminds us that "neighbor" is larger than that, that God's dominion means we are ALL neighbors no matter the distance or the country. Notice how Jesus did not say – "but also" or says that "love of neighbor as an option" to think about doing. No, beloved community – the command is – "We shall love our God with every part of our being AND our neighbor as much as ourselves." No options here Pharisees! "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Here beloved community is the beginning of what it means to "love one another as I have loved you." Period! There are no options, there is no ambiguity, there is no gray area – "Love God and neighbor as we love ourselves with every part of our being." The sum of all the law, the sum of

the first five books in the Old Testament hang on these two commandments – “Love God, love neighbor and love self with every part of our being.”

Beloved church, beloved virtual world, I believe what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees is this – “Here is what comes from the House of David, the lineage where the Messiah shall come from – “‘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 neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the all and the prophets.” Beloveds of God – this is not only a powerful statement, but an extremely empowering one – Amen! All of humanity is encompassed on this statement – praise be to God!

Let us close with this then beloveds. Like Isidor Isaac Rabi, let us ask this question. Who then is our neighbor? Jesus answers that for us in Luke 10:25-37 “On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where

the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.