



Pentecost 22A (Proper 25)

Sunday, October 25, 2026

RCL: Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; **Matthew 22:34-46**

Opening Prayer |

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Context |

By the start of Matthew 22, Jesus has already entered Jerusalem and begun the forward motion towards his passion (which will be recounted in Chapters 26 and 27). Following his cleansing of the Temple and a series of parables directed towards the religious authorities, there next unfolds a series of questions and dialogues which form the substance of this chapter.

First, the Pharisees send several disciples and Herodians (those loyally committed to the throne of Herod and his family) to ask Jesus about the lawfulness of paying taxes. These two groups might seem an odd combination to be described as a unit, yet it is evident that they had a common agreement on the disruptive, subversive nature of Jesus's identity and ministry, and they aligned together in an attempt to discredit him.

Next, the Sadducees question Jesus concerning marriage, resurrection, and the afterlife. Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees held that the soul perished at death. In their view, the resurrection of the dead was not a scripturally supported idea.

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After Jesus stumps both sets of questioners, the Pharisees next send forward an “expert in the law” to “test” Jesus. Jesus’s response to this questioning weaves together a tapestry of familiar Hebrew scriptures. Questioned as to the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus quotes a portion of the *Shema*, a foundational Jewish prayer originating in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and traditionally recited twice a day. Continuing his answer, Jesus reframes a commandment found in Leviticus 19:18, that “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus then launches a question back at the Pharisees concerning the identity of the Messiah, to which the Pharisees reply that the Messiah is the “son of David.” Jesus quotes back Psalm 110— another familiar passage of scripture that puts another stop to the rapid line of testing and questioning. Through this mixture of critical and familiar Hebrew scriptural references, Jesus continues to build a fulsome basis for his identity, mission, and ministry at a crucial point in the gospel narrative.

Theological Reflection |

In today’s gospel text, Jesus leans on teachings very old and familiar to achieve something completely new. Much earlier in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus had declared that he has come not to “abolish the Law or the Prophets...but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). In this text from Matthew 22, we gain a deeper understanding of what such a fulfillment looks like.

After all, when Jesus is asked which commandment in the Law is the greatest, he noticeably does not produce a new commandment or saying. Rather, he reaches into the Hebrew scriptures and brings together two familiar passages. For Jesus, these two central commandments provide a lens through which to interpret the whole law. Love of God and love of neighbor stand at the heart of Jesus’s teaching and ministry, as well as at the heart of the life to which he calls each of those who follow him.

There is a well-known story from the Talmud that echoes the sentiment of Christ’s message today. The story recounts how a Gentile desired to convert to Judaism. However, there was a catch: He would only convert to Judaism if a Rabbi would teach him the breadth of the Torah while the hopeful new convert was standing on one foot. First the seeker went to the prominent Rabbi Shammai who immediately threw the individual out of his home after hearing the unusual request. However, showing much perseverance, the individual next approached Rabbi Hillel, who agreed to take on the challenge. Hillel said, “what is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation of this—go and study it!” (Brombacher, “On One Foot,” chabad.org). This story echoes the sentiment that Jesus sets forth in positioning love of neighbor at the heart of our love for God.

This conversation resonates in a setting charged with both political and religious tension. The various groups assembled had different nuances to the beliefs and interpretations of Scripture held by their religious authorities. Engaged in dialogue with Jesus, each held their own hopes and expectations about the future of God's people. They each had unique views about the role of the coming Messiah, the role of the present-day secular authorities, and how the fulfillment of the law was to play out in their own lifetimes and beyond. They all lived with pressing questions about what God had planned for Israel, and what their futures were going to look like. As the embodiment of God's promises and the fulfillment of much Messianic anticipation, Jesus does something rather surprising: He grounds the questions in the simple and the day-to-day. He embeds the horizon of God's promise future in the interactions of daily life: How we treat the neighbors and strangers in our midst is a direct reflection of how we respond to God's love for us.

This love for "neighbor" extends beyond our fellow humanity to also concern all those neighbors whom God has connected us to in creation. To truly love our neighbor means to care for their wellbeing and to desire for them to have access to the same resources and opportunities that we would desire for ourselves. When we care for one another and for the earth around us, we participate in the love of God that has been demonstrated to us through the person of Jesus Christ.

It is in this way that Jesus fulfills the law: not by disregarding it, but by highlighting and pointing us toward its most central purpose. Love of God cannot be separated from love of neighbor or from our responsibility towards the world and all those human and non-human inhabitants whom God has entrusted to our care.

Discussion Questions |

- Are there ways or places or practices in which you find it easy to love God through your neighbor? Where is it more difficult?
- When has the love shown to you by a neighbor helped you to see God better?
- Who qualifies as a "neighbor" in our Christian calling? Does anyone exist outside of this category?
- How do you see the call to love God and neighbor as extending beyond the human family? What are some examples that come to mind in your everyday life?

Faith in Practice |

This week, take up in your prayer and practice the expanded concept of “neighbor” from Matthew 22. Identify one person you interact with regularly, but with whom you have had little substantive interaction. First, pray for this person. Then, look for an appropriate opportunity to share with them the love God has for them. Perhaps that means having a conversation to learn more about their life and interests, writing a card, sharing a small gift, or simply taking the time to acknowledge them in a meaningful way. It does not need to be a grand gesture! The point is to notice someone who has become part of the background of your life. Make the choice to see them—and treat them—as your neighbor in a deeper way.

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