

**The Rev. Luke Selles**

**Proper 26, Year B**

**Church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields**

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“Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one; you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than this.” In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In our Gospel passage today, Jesus is speaking with the Sadducees, the high priestly class, when a scribe approaches him with a question: which of the commandments is greatest? Jesus answers with the line from Deuteronomy Ch. 6 often referred to as the “Shema” – “Hear” or “Listen” in Ancient Hebrew. This passage in the final book of the Torah is written as a summation of what has come before, beginning with God’s covenant with their ancestors and God’s deliverance of them from slavery in the Land of Egypt. God, as part of this covenant, promises them everything – on the condition that they give everything in return. In the Hebrew, the words translated here as “heart,” “soul,” and “might” translate more closely to “will,” “life” or “appetite,” and “muchness” or “abundance.” The People of Israel, to uphold their part of the covenant, must never forget that all that they have and all that they are – their life, their mind or will, and their “muchness” – their physical, emotional, and spiritual resources – are *from* God and so must *return* to God.

Jesus, faithful to his tradition, teaches this as the central commandment adding that we must love our neighbor as ourself. To love God, he is teaching, is to love what God loves. And not merely with our emotions or feelings – no, with all that we *are* and all that we *have*.

In the new covenant that Jesus has made, we no longer follow the ritual observances and purity laws found in the Law of Moses. And this is not because Jesus has gotten rid of or *abolished* the Law, but, as Matthew’s Gospel puts it, *fulfilled* it.

However you understand Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, whatever your theory of atonement, we who follow Jesus, who love Jesus, who see Jesus in the face of friend and stranger and enemy – through the power of his Great Sacrifice and the Holy Spirit's presence among and within us are made one with God – and thus with all that God loves – forever.

There remains the elephant – or perhaps, *donkey* – in the room: the election this week, the stakes of which feel sky high. I could tell you to remember the “Shema” – to worship and love God at the polls as you vote. But I suspect you know that already. Instead I want to remind you that we who identify as Christians promise to surrender ourselves to God trusting in God's love for us. So with that, let us remember – let us set a reminder on our phones, scribble it on our hands, hang it from our rearview mirror or write it on our bathroom mirror – that regardless of any earthly ruler come January 20th, we commit to loving Jesus and those, both friend and foe, that he loves. Amen.