MOVING TO THE NEXT

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October 25, 2026
Pentecost 22

1st Thessalonians 2:1-8

> And you yourselves know, sisters and brothers, that our coming among you was not without effect. We had, as you know, been given rough treatment at Philippi, and it was our God who gave us the courage to proclaim the Good News to you in the face of stiff opposition. We don't preach because of impure motives or deceit or any sort of trickery; rather, it was God who decided that we are fit to be entrusted with the Good News, and when we are speaking, we're trying to please not mortals, but God, who can read our inmost thoughts. You know very well – and we can swear it before God – that never at any time has our speech been simple flattery or a cover for trying to get money; nor have we ever looked for any special honour from you or from anyone else – even though we could have imposed ourselves on you as apostles of Christ. On the contrary, while we were with you, we were as gentle as any nursing mother caring for her little ones. So well disposed were we toward you, in fact, that we were willing to share with you not only the Good News, but our lives as well – you had become that dear to us.

Matthew 22:34-46

> When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had left the Sadducees speechless, they gathered together, and one of them, an expert on the Law, attempted to trick Jesus with this question: "Teacher, which commandment of the Law is the greatest?" Jesus answered: "'You must love the Most High God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.' "That is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: 'You must love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments the whole Law is based – and the Prophets as well." While the Pharisees were gathered around him, Jesus asked them this question: "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose descendant is the Messiah? They said, "David's." Then Jesus asked, "Then how is it that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls the Messiah 'Sovereign,'? For he says, 'The Most High said to my Sovereign, "Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies under your foot."' "If David calls the Messiah 'Sovereign,' how can the Messiah be a descendant of David?" No one could reply, and from that day on no one dared ask him any more questions.



I don't drink. I mean, obviously I drink. I mean, we all need water in some form or another. Sometimes, you steep through some ground up seeds or maybe through some leaves. But I don't, you know, "drink". I never have actually. If you want to ask me later why that was the case for me, then I'd be more than happy to tell you. But even so, you know, I'm experiencing a bit of a hangover post Alberta referendum. The results of question 10 were decisive, 3 to one. And it appears that most or maybe even many of the option two voters are kind of reluctantly giving up on their independence plans for now and getting behind the premier. Sure, the diehards aren't going away and they're already thinking about their next step. They're going to see if they can get a leadership review and unseat the leader of the party that brought the referenda. My prediction is it probably won't be able to be successful in that way. There seems to be too much moving on and trying to play nice. It is

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- fortunately for all of us - time to move on to something else. And the task before us is then to figure out what's next. And there's not going to be one universal answer.

Our gospel reading today started in chapter 22 of Matthew at verse 34. But if we' have read the section before it, verses 23-33, we would have learned that there were a group of Sadducees, which is the sect of first century Judaism, that quizzed Jesus on how our earthly relationships are going to work in the afterlife. Now, it was a disingenuous question because Sadducees only accepted the first five books of the Bible - The Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy - as authoritative scripture. And so, they didn't believe in an afterlife. And so when they're asking Jesus about how the afterlife works, they're trying to get him to say something nonsensical that people would say, "Well, then maybe that Sadducee view is more plausible." But Jesus responded that their question was just presuming things that just aren't true. You're making too direct a line between this life and an afterlife. And Jesus caught them up with some clever word play…not all that different than the second half of today's reading: who is David's child. It's like kind of that kind of word play that when I read it I go I don't really get how that's convincing but I guess it's convincing because the Sadducees left dumbfounded and then today we heard when the Pharisees, which which are is another first century Jewish sect; Jesus largely adhered to Pharisaic beliefs. *When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had left the Sadducees speechless, they gathered together and one of them, an expert in the law, attempted to trick Jesus with a question*. And as I mentioned, if you saw last week's service, you might remember that some Pharisees were among that group that tried to get Jesus to take an unpopular position on whether the Torah allowed the people of Galilee and Judea to pay taxes to the Roman emperor. That attempt didn't work. And so now the Pharisees have regrouped and they notice that Jesus similarly won a similar kind of debate with the Sadducees. And so the Pharisees said, "Okay, we're going to try again and we're ready to move on to a new attempt." *Jesus, which commandment in all of the law is the greatest?* And Jesus answers with what I see is kind of Jesus' mission statement. *Love at my God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might and love your neighbor as yourself*. These two Torah commandments are to love. One from Deuteronomy 6:5 and one from Leviticus chapter 19 verse 18. Because they come from those first five books, even the Sadducees might have been convinced by that argument.

Matthew's text doesn't really let us into how the questioner reacted. But this same story is told also in the Gospels of Mark and in Luke. Mark reports that the questioner commended Jesus for the answer. *You are right*, the questioner says in Mark's version, *these are more important than all of the burnt offerings, all of the sacrifices*. Now, Luke's version is slightly different. The law expert's question is different. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" And it's Jesus who asks the law expert, "Well, what does the Torah say?" And it's the lawyer who quotes Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19 and says, "Love God. Love your neighbor." And it's Jesus who confirms the accuracy. *You have answered correctly*.

Now there is dominant scholarly theory on why Matthew, Mark and Luke have so much overlap and so much in common in the stories they tell. Sometimes they even using the exact same wording. It is called the *two source hypothesis*. I'm not going to give a full theological lecture on the two source hypothesis today other than to say that one of the sources is Mark. Mark is the first of those three gospels to be written and Matthew's and Luke's authors had access to Mark's gospel as a starting point. So they built on Mark. Matthew and Luke didn't shy away though from editing what they got from Mark. They were happy to expand, sometimes change language, sometimes move the narratives around (this happened earlier or later) or combine things together to make more sense in the way the stories were read. In fact, why do we think Luke switched Jesus to be the questioner in this story rather than the answerer? It's because Luke is setting up the next story that Luke is going to tell. You see, in Luke's version, the lawyer says, "Well, you have to love God and you have to love your neighbor." And Jesus says, "You're right." And then the lawyer says, "Well, who's my neighbor?" And then

Jesus goes on to tell a story about being neighborly. A lot of us know that as the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*. They took their poetic license, the different authors, and how they told it, but all of these early church communities centered these teachings with the same message: that the important tenants of one's faith are *to love God with your whole being* and *to love your neighbor as yourself*. And in each version, no matter how they put the words together, Jesus' insistence on this interpretation of scripture leaves others around unable to debate any further with him.

Indulge me a little aside here. I'll get back to moving on in a minute. So, I'm not quite ready to move on. I'll be about moving on in a minute here. Earlier this week, I was able to join in an online Bible study with some other ministers from across the prairies, and I discovered an aspect of this story that I hadn't really focused on before. The language discrepancy between what the commandment is as written in Deuteronomy is different than how the gospels quote it. See, in Deuteronomy, you love God with three ways. You love God with your *heart*, with your *soul* (your spirit), and with your *might* (with your strength). But Matthew today said, "Love God with your *heart*." That's the same. With your *soul*, the spirit, that's the same. But with your *mind*, not your might. So the original's might, strength. Love God with your strength. And the gospel say love God with your mind. Now it can't be a misunderstanding. I know that the audiences that these gospels were written to were gentile non-Jewish audiences and so maybe weren't as familiar with the Deuteronomy text, but it was a very well-known prayer in Jesus' time. It was the daily prayer people said it left and and arrived at their homes every day. *Here, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. Love God with all your heart, soul, and might*. There's no way Jesus quoted it wrong. Now, Jesus might have decided to change it, but I can't imagine that he would change it without commenting on why he changed might to mind. So I have to think that the most likely explanation is that the change happened when the authors were sharing the story a couple decades later. And we can see the evolution of the change actually if we just look at the three gospels. If Mark is the oldest, what does Mark say? Mark says he actually quotes Deuteronomy correctly. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and might. But then he adds the fourth one… and mind. Actually, I think he says heart, soul, mind, and might. The first gospel quoted Deuteronomy correctly, but added in mind. And the curious part is that if Mark and if Matthew and Luke had a copy of Mark, why did they take the might out that came from Deuteronomy and that came from Mark? As we heard this morning, they had only three: heart, soul and mind.

What means are we invited to love God? Heart. They all agree on that. Our emotions, our ability to feel how we're feeling and and empathize with how others are feeling. The impact of love. Soul (through our spirit) that realm that reaches beyond us to a mystery we can't explain but feel is there. Its trust, hope; it's devotion; it's prayer; it's worship. And the mind: our thinking, our calculated reason knowing God is loving God. That's what the early church was invited to do. Your heart, your soul, and your mind. The feelings, the thoughts, the spirit. What those three have in common is that they're all internal. They're all things we could do completely on our own. I can love God with how I feel. I can love God with how I connect with God in spiritual ways. and I can love God with how I think. And they fit well into the first century philosophy that was still largely Greek. The Socratic-Platonic ways of thinking, still dominating the Roman world from the time that Alexander the Great traveled across this region and brought Greek philosophy.

The original still found a place in Mark's version: might, strength. It adds something different to the discussion. The heart, mind, and soul are all in internal ways of loving God. It's personal and that's valuable and that's deeply important. But *might* talks about something that is external. It's active. It's interactive. I'm using my body to love God. Where I choose to go, how I choose to move, the expression on my face.

Can we hear an instruction to love God with both mind and might, both thought and action? Now, certainly this would be very consistent with the second commandment, wouldn't it? To love your neighbor as yourself,

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because you really can't have just a theoretical love of your neighbor. It has to be a love that's lived out practically. There was a great verse we sang during the hymnsing today: in the third sing song from Then Let Us Sing:

> In our discord and division, hearts can still be understood.
> Love is with us when we're working turning strangers into kin.
> Love invites us and unites us to be better than we've been.

That's loving with our might, with our bodies, with our actions.

In both last week's and this week's Pharisee Jesus encounter stories and in the Sadducee one that I talked about, the confrontations debates had the potential of testing Jesus' knowledge and Jesus' credibility. And a way of reading it was that there was a hope that maybe this would stop Jesus' progress, that Jesus wouldn't be able to take the next step in these communities. But in the end, it was the so-called experts who had to move on, which allowed space for Jesus to move on as well.

It's generally not a very helpful life plan to be stuck in one moment for too long, to be stagnant. But we should be open to exploring, discovering, and maybe moving on into something we can't 100% predict. But that is where tricking becomes testing. That's where learning and change and growth occur.

In our other reading, Paul talks about a visit that he had with the early Christian community in Philippi. He's in Thessalonica and he mentions that he was not well received in Philippi but that he has been well received in Thessalonica and it's re-enouraged him in his work. You almost get the sense he wasn't sure if he wanted to try this again having had such a negative experience in a previous visit with a different church. But Paul's confidence seems to have been affected by the actions and the lived out compassion of the people of Thessalonica. Paul could have remained stuck and wallowed in what he might consider a failure, but he moved on.

Yesterday I was with a number of people from various churches all across northern Alberta as the Northern Spirit Region met in Camrose. And one of the things we did is we engaged with the current discussions of the United Church that we're calling Toward 2035. The first step is often to say okay where are we now? Maybe how did we get here? But if you stay there and all you do is say, "How did we get to where we are now and how do we feel about that?" You're not moving toward anything. Certainly not moving toward 2035. Or when you get to 2035, you'll still be thinking about 2020.

We always need to be moving toward moving to the next. We're not living in the exact same context that we were even a week ago. We've moved into a new time. We have in front of us new opportunities, new challenges. And so let's accept that. Let's accept this challenge, this opportunity: this opportunity to test ourselves and discover what will be next. Now, some of us are making major moves like Irene. But all of us are on a path that says *what's next*. The encouragement is to find the new that is waiting for us. And so encouraged by Jesus' echo of that ancient teaching, let's move on in love. A love that we will live out in not only our feelings and our thoughts and our spirits, but also in our actions.

Amen.

#600VU When I Needed a Neighbour

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