



...an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?" Jesus replied, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." (Matt 22.35-40)

Beyond a Battle of the Wits

- This is one of those stories in which we find Jesus pitted against the ruling religious classes of Jerusalem as they try to stump him with terribly difficult theological questions. In this scene the Pharisees take their best shot. Famous for meticulously adhering to the Jewish Law, they ask Jesus to point out the most important commandment within it.
- There were some six-hundred-odd commandments to be considered, so the question was designed as a trap. If Jesus elevates one commandment over the others, they can accuse him of devaluing or disrespecting any of the other commandments of their choosing. It's perhaps a little like asking a parent which of their four children they love most; there's just no right answer.
- But the trap fails miserably as Jesus responds with a two-part return. Instead of choosing between commandments, he brilliantly sums up the entire Mosaic Law with a one-liner, drawing all the commandments together under these two imperatives: *love God with everything you've got, and love your neighbour as yourself.* (Exodus 3.6, Deut 6.5) Game, set, match - Jesus.

- But, as is common in other episodes, Jesus not only bests his opponents, he draws them into something more - what it is to live a life of faith. While the religious professionals squabble over who is right about this detail or that, trying to lure Jesus also into their debates, he moves the discussion *beyond a battle of the wits* and we end up reflecting on a *battle of the heart*. "Love God with everything you've got", says Jesus "and love the one next to you like you love yourself, because that's just as important."

Alive in Faith; Alive in Love

- Jesus has an uncanny way of cutting through the pettiness and distraction and getting to the heart of things. Genuine faith, he says, starts with a complete submission to God, and follows with a commitment to care about and for the other.
- If we're at all to take Jesus' words here seriously, then loving our neighbour is a non-negotiable, even an inevitability, in life with God. It means that prioritizing, serving and dignifying God always has something to do with prioritizing, serving and dignifying the person beside us.
- A life of faith then, we could say, is about learning to use our *whole heart*. It means that we don't divide things up as God-life or ordinary-life. We don't have a private connection with God, somehow removed from our connections to others. So, in many ways being alive in faith will mean finding ourselves alive in love. And that's what St. John tells us also: *you can't say you love God and not love others*. (1 John 4)

The End of the Map

- "But who is my neighbour? Who is the one beside me?" we might ask, and we wouldn't be the first. Jesus' response is, time and again in the Gospel stories, "everyone". That's part of what we're seeing in our study of the Gospel of St. Luke. *Everyone* is being drawn together by Jesus. There are no

outsiders; no non-belongers in God's new world. "So, be hospitable to the stranger", says Jesus "and love even the one you've called an enemy." (Matthew 25.35, 5.43-48)

- It sounds simple, but if the cross shows us anything, it's that that's easier said than done. If *everyone* is my neighbour, where does that end? Where exactly is the end of the map? For Jesus, and for the first Christians, the answer was simply: *there is no end of the map*.
- As my friend said to me just the other day, "Every time we draw a line we think God won't cross, we turn around to find Jesus on the other side of it." And that's because God's love and life is not limited like our lives and love. It's instead limitless - and given the chance will run anywhere we let it.
- "So give God your *whole* self", we hear Jesus say "and find him mysteriously filling you with love for the *whole* world." That's the picture we're given of Christ on the cross, and that's the life we're invited into as Christ's followers.

Local & Global

- It's easy to see, then, why the Church is both *decidedly local*, but also *inevitably global*. Even the smallest, segregated group of Christians is connected to everything else God is up to in the world, because they're plugged into God's life and love.
- And this is also why throughout Christian history churches have been concerned not only with the needs of their *immediate* communities, but the needs of the *global* community. The one next to me is not just the one immediately next to me, but also the one beyond.
- If God's love isn't just local, then there are no *strictly local* churches, every church is both local and every church is global.
- Living Waters is no exception. Being alive in faith, alive in love, means being open to that same love running out around the world through us: through

our prayer, our giving, our encouragement of other Christians, and our hands-on service.

- We're all heart, we're whole hearted.

Discussion Questions

- Why is the Church “decidedly local”?
- Why is the Church “inevitably global”?
- Where do we, in our context, often regard as the “end of the map”?
- Share about a time you were a part of loving your neighbour “at the end of the map” or seeing people who did.