

Columbia, Missouri
The Worship of God • September 5, 2021



The Scripture
Matthew 22:36-40

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘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 law and the prophets.”

The Message
“Courageous: Living into Our Values”
Adonica Coleman
Director of Community Engagement

Over the course of this last year, a lot of people were forced to do things that they had not done before. Working from home was one of those things. I’ve always had a fairly flexible schedule, and my office has always been at the house. However, a regular day for me pre-pandemic consisted of getting the kids off to school, checking some emails in my office, and then spending most of the day out meeting clients, or at site visits.

During the pandemic I was forced, like most were, to actually stay home and work all day, every day. That day went a little bit differently. Wake up, get the kids up and fed. Get them logged in downstairs for their virtual classes, sit down in the office, and start working. Then a kid knocks on the door. They’ve been knocked offline, or they need help with a lesson. I go downstairs to help and, on my way, out of their room I notice a pile of dirty towels, so I grab those and put them in the washing machine on my way back to my office. When I hit the stairs to go up, I grab the banister and realize it is

sticky, so I pass the office and go to the kitchen to wet a towel. When I get to the kitchen, I see dirty breakfast dishes on the counter and begin to load those in the dishwasher. While bending over to open the dishwasher, I see crumbs on the floor, so I go to get the broom. So after about 50 distractions, I finally go back to the office to get something done. By that time, the kids are upstairs for lunch. And so, it began again.

This was not just one day. This became my regular routine because there are always so many things to be done. All necessary, all good things, but were they the most important things to be doing when I needed to get work done? I needed to refocus my priorities.

Our text today shows us a clear picture of how Jesus prioritized the commandments. When asked what were the most important, he clearly states Love God and Love Your Neighbor. This series is about Courage; it doesn't take much courage to love God on most days. God, after all, is easy to love, right? God is loving, kind, patient, the answerer of prayers, the bearer of burdens.

What about when you are on the struggle bus? What about the days when nothing is going according to your perfectly-laid-out plans, or when tragedy strikes, or when you can't find your way even though you're doing all the right things? How easy is it to trust and even love God then? That is when we must dig deep and find the courage to love even when we aren't sure we completely trust God in those moments.

Given that, I still say that overall, it is far easier to love God, which is the first commandment mentioned, than it is to love neighbors which is the second. However, the Bible clearly tells us in 1 John 4:20 that if anyone says they love God whom they have never seen and doesn't love their brother or sister whom they have seen, that they are a liar. We cannot truly love God and then have anything but love for all people. According to the passage, those two things cannot exist at the same time. So, here's the question, why is it difficult to love the people we see every day? Our very brothers and sisters, neighbors, coworkers, and teammates?

Jesus made it very plain in our guiding text, Love God. Love your neighbor, and all the other commandments hang on those two. That really puts a lot of weight on those two things. God, fairly easy to love for all the reasons named above plus a million more. Our brothers and sisters...our neighbors? The ones who don't live quite the way we wish they would, or don't say just the right things at the right time, the ones who no longer meet our emotional needs, the ones who just outright get on our nerves. Dig deeper friends...those are the very neighbors being referenced. The Word doesn't say love the ones who treat you right, love you right and do you right... the ones who believe exactly what you believe and do exactly what you think they should.

But God, what about the people who argue with my well-researched points on social media...Love Your Neighbor. But God what about that person who talked bad about me behind my back...Love Your Neighbor. Jesus laid the priority right out for us.... Love your neighbor.

The Bible, in several places, makes clear that the opposite of love isn't hate...it's actually fear. And fear can keep us from loving others and walking in the freedom of God's love. Here is where the courage comes in. Praise be to God that perfect love casts out fear, but we must take those courageous steps to trust and hold on to that perfect love.

There are 613 commandments, and Jesus knew all of them but when asked what was most important the answer was simple. Love God, Love Neighbor. Jesus spoke with such clarity, such a laser focus. Zero confusion. A lot of times we hear people say "big picture;" you gotta see the big picture. And while that's true, we do need to see the larger picture to know what the overall goal or outcome we are seeking, but in order to reach that we need that thirteen-inch mentality. Priorities.

It's been said that if you have more than three priorities, then you have no priorities. We, as people, are drawn to so many different things, but without some clarity on our deepest held values, we have no clear focus. Courageous living requires clarity if we are to be effective at living out our purpose.

So how do we get the clarity we need to prioritize living out our purposes? We live in a **VUCA** world (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) where we are pulled this way and that way, family, relationships, meetings, and not to mention inundated with news about the latest fires, hurricanes, troop removals, and variants? We know we can't process it all, and it starts to feel overwhelming. If you are feeling drawn and quartered, chances are it might be time to take a pause. Priorities involve focus and being able to make judgment calls. While ambiguity and uncertainty exist in the world around us, we should never be ambiguous about our purpose and priorities. In these areas, we must be clear because this is what should guide us in our daily lives. When we think about how clear Jesus was in naming the most important commandments, Love God and Love Neighbor. We should strive to "be like Jesus" when it comes to identifying our priorities and purpose. The courage piece comes in once those are established... then we must make judgment calls. Invited to 32 gatherings per week, does that fit into what you have prioritized? Asked to be on yet another board or committee? It may very well be a great cause. And there are a lot of great causes, but is this something that you have a passion for? Does it fall into line with what you have identified as a priority? Not to say those other things aren't important and worthy... but like Mark said a few weeks ago, "Is it yours to do?" If the answer is *no*, we must have

the courage to turn down some things, step back from some over commitments and to cut back possibly even on some people.

What I ended up doing when I was working from home was hanging a white board in my office directly across from my desk. I would then write down my priorities for the day and then scratch them off once they were done. Anything that was a lower priority didn't go on the board, I got to those if and when I could get to them. That is how I was able to focus in and actually get things done.

Collective Courage that leads to a clarity in purpose is what we are aiming for here at Broadway. The courage to Love God and neighbor. Even when it's a challenge, even when we don't agree. The courage to say no to some things so we can get to a better yes. The courage to walk into the new action steps to make reality the vision which has been made plain. Honored to walk in that Collective Courage together.

Song of Focus
"Where Your Love Leads"
WORDS AND MUSIC BY ED VARNUM

1. Creator, Son, with Spirit one,
lead me this day: your will be done.
With so many tasks and so many needs,
focus my path to where your love leads.

One God, one faith in water uniting,
yet churches are many, divided and fighting.
Christians embattled with contrasting creeds,
focus our paths to where your love leads.
2. Save us, our Lord, from sin that divides,
seeking faith, hope, and love; in these we abide.
Showing our faith through Christ-like deeds,
focus our paths to where your love leads.

One God, one faith in water uniting,
yet churches are many, divided and fighting.
Christians embattled with contrasting creeds,
focus our paths to where your love leads.

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH