

SERMON - November 5, 2006
Mark 12 "Love All"

G&P

I collected all of my keys this morning and put them together. I was reminded of a comedy routine performed by Jeff Foxworthy. He was talking about all of the keys that he has in his home. He has keys that he doesn't even know what they unlock anymore. Keys he doesn't even know where they came from, they just somehow ended up on the key ring.

Then he says:

I could put all of my keys together on one key ring, and I could be the High School Janitor tonight. He was right, I remember my high school janitor with a million keys on his belt. He was the most powerful person on campus. He had a key for everything. If you wanted to get into a room, forget the principal, get a hold of the janitor.

We have many keys to things, but how do we get the key to life? How do we hold onto the key of life that Jesus gives to us?

Those who were testing Jesus in today's gospel were also searching for the key to new life. The key that would open up the way to God. One of those keys was the commandments. There were 621 laws that they needed to keep, but over the years they had lost the key to keeping them all. They had become insurmountable, because if you didn't keep them then you were not going to make it to heaven. Salvation was elusive.

In this part of Mark, Jesus is being tested by the Sadducees and the keeper of the Law. One of those who kept the law asked Jesus this:

MK 12:28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating.

Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him,

"Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

MK 12:29-33 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 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: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Jesus has recalled one of Israel's ancient words of faith that the faithful said from the heart. Love the Lord God with all that you are and all that have. Love God. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. Now this love is not physical love of romance novels. It is not the friendship kind of love. No, it is the love that is found only in God. It is the agape love that sees life in the other person. It is the agape love that is sacrificial, that moves us out of ourselves.

This is the surprise of this agape love: The more we seek it for ourselves, the more elusive it becomes. The more we seek God in our life and in our relationships, the more filling it becomes.

It is a love that is born in the cross of Jesus Christ and finds its power in the resurrection to new life. It is a love that comes to us freely in our baptisms, where we have died to sin and are washed clean and come out of that water clean and ready for living. This becomes for us a daily occurrence as Luther tells us. We die daily to sin and are washed clean daily, so that we might live this new life in Jesus to its fullest. This is where our relationship with God in Jesus Christ begins. Jesus claims us as his own. This is the key from this text: relationships.

It is all about our relationship with God and with one another. For we were made for relationship with one another. We were created in such a way that we would interact with one another, that we would be about the life of forgiving and being forgiven. We were created to love as we have been loved by God.

But what happens along the way? What happens to us? We wander away from the very foundations of the faith. We end up embracing the way of the world. We no longer worry about the neighbor or even our relationship with God. God will love me and I will love God when I find the time. We will love our neighbor as long as they are not a democrat if you are a republican or they are a republican and you are a democrat. We have entered the politics of hate. And who loses? The land loses, those who have no voice lose, those who are too young to vote lose.

Who is our neighbor? What is the key to these relationships? As long as we seek to fulfill our

own desires and our own purpose apart from God, we will be lost, and we will lose. It will be like picking the wrong key to the car on the Price is Right and walk away in shame for being so stupid. But even then we discover that God in Jesus Christ does not give up on us.

In his book, Sources of Strength, President Jimmy Carter shared this lesson.

After a personal witnessing experience with Eloy Cruz, an admirable Cuban pastor who had surprising rapport with very poor immigrants from Puerto Rico, I asked him for the secret of his success. He was modest and embarrassed, but he finally said, "Senor Jimmy, we only need to have two loves in our lives. For God, and for the person who happens to be in front of us at any time." That simple yet profound theology has been a great help to me in understanding the Scriptures. In essence, the whole Bible is an explanation of those two loves.

Jimmy Carter, Sources of Strength, Meditations on Scripture for a Living Faith, Times Books, 1997, p. xvii;

Love for God and love for the person who happens to be in front of you at the time.

The *San Diego Union-Tribune* reported the story of Nicholas Zenns. On his night job at Taco Bell, 17-year-old Nicholas was taking orders at the drive-up window. He heard a woman scream, turned, and saw a very pregnant Deborah Anderson standing in front of him.

The high-school student pulled off his headset, called the paramedics, and tried to make the woman comfortable. But the baby wouldn't wait.

"The baby's head just popped out into my hands," Nicholas said. Paramedics finally arrived and took baby and parents to the hospital. Nicholas cleaned up, "sterilized my hands about a thousand times," and finished his shift.

Nicholas says the event changed his perspective. "Things have been pretty bad in my life lately, and then I got to do this. I'm really glad."

In the same way, there's a great joy whenever we get the chance to lead someone to new birth in Christ.

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He was not far from the kingdom of God on that night. We were made for each other, we were

made to care for each other, we were made to give out of our hearts and out of our treasure for each other. Jesus has given us the key to living and it has come to us in the shape of the cross. Key that unlocks our hearts to reach out to those who are in front of us at the time as God in Jesus has reached out to us and at the right time poured his Holy Spirit into us for life now and salvation to come.

So celebrate the neighbors in your lives as you come to the altar this morning to unload your burdens and know forgiveness in your living.

AMEN