



Sermons from Northwood United Church

"Tune in to our loves and longings"

Mark 12:28-34

Will Sparks

November 15, 2015

May the words of our mouths, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives, be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Hopefully in your bulletin today you had 4 little pieces of paper: 3 green and 1 yellow.
Process:

- what is one thing you love to be involved with at Northwood- do? event, group, activity
- what is the one event/happening/group that you wish Northwood had (or had more of)?
(this taps into the longing)

Hold on to those for a bit.

What is the most important commandment? That's what they asked Jesus right? What is the most important thing we can be doing as faithful people. And Jesus reaches way back into the ancient tradition and says the words from the book of Deuteronomy that form the beginning of both morning and evening prayer, that Jews dream will be their last words on earth, that faithful Jews teach their children to say before they go to sleep every night. It is called the Shemah, and it goes "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 might."

Can you imagine if those were the words that you said when you first woke up every day, and when you went to sleep every night. Surely if that were the case, they would also be the words that formed your last breath as well. Imagine how that would shape your life- a commitment to love God with all you have and all you are. Imagine how it would change things for you.

And Jesus adds something to it. "Love your neighbour as yourself." Imagine if that too became your opening and closing mantra for the day- spoken on your second breath- Love your neighbour as yourself. How would it change the way you live if these were the spiritual practices that shaped our lives, these prayers, these commandments, these most important things. No wonder after Jesus answers the scribe, the scribe shuts up and decides not to ask any more questions. He's getting right to the core of things.

I want to try something. I have put them up there on the screen, and I want us to try this. I have written the Shemah and the second commandment of Jesus as a commitment and I invite you to say them with me a couple of times, kind of as a prayer:

"My God is one God. I shall love the Lord my God with all my heart, and with all my soul, and with all my strength. And I shall love my neighbour as I love myself.... My God is one God. I shall love the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my strength. And I shall love my neighbour as I love myself."

What does that do for you as a spiritual practice? The repeating of the core love commandment of Jesus. For me there is a sense of grounding, getting down to basics, having my feet firmly planted on solid ground, getting first things first. And I can see why Jesus put them first as the core teachings of the faith. Love is at the centre. And it is not just love as an internal experience of the heart, but it is a life shaping love, and identity shaping love which encompasses the soul- the identity- who I am. And it also involves the way I use my life, my power, my

strength. And then of course, with the second commandment, loving neighbour as we love ourselves, it moves out into the world, into our relationships, into our politics, into community.

In a lot of ways that is what we are about today as a community of faith at our congregational forum after the service- grounding in the most important things. We will be trying to map our ministry here at Northwood. And that is not just a fun exercise. We are in a time of re-shaping in which it has become clear that a ministry with two full time ministers, a full time secretary, and various other paid positions in music and custodial is more than we can afford. The trouble is, we love our people, we love the way we shape ministry, and its really hard to just cut staff. We know it will affect the way ministry happens here, and the way our community works.

So we have decided to draw a map of our ministry based on what we love. Because it is true, loving shapes your life. If want to know what is core, important, first in peoples lives, look at what they love to do, who they love to be with, how they love in the world, what they give themselves to. We say here at Northwood, that we are here to embrace our community with the love so Christ. And a couple of years ago we held a couple of gatherings that led us to name four key things that we imagine ourselves to be here, four key ways we see ourselves living out the love we seek to live out: 1. we are a community of belonging, where people can find a real place to belong, loved and accepted as they are, 2. we are a community of learning and growth, for every age, a community where faith is not static but grows and changes, is nurtured and challenged, 3. We are a community that reaches out, makes a difference in the neighbourhood, is affected by what is going on in the world, has an open door, 4. And we are a community of light-of lightness of spirit as well as the light of hope and joy and celebration.

That is the way we see ourselves. If we were to add up all the things we do, especially all the things we love to do, would it add up to that? What would that actually look like?

That is the challenge. And it is not just the challenge for our church in this moment but it is always the challenge. As people who believe in love at the core of life, who believe in a loving God who has anointed us to love with everything we've got, and everything we are, that is the challenge- to practice that love in the things we do, in the priorities of our lives, to pay attention to our loves and longings, and work with God in the shaping of it.

And so now, I invite you to take those 4 pieces of paper upon which you have written the things you love to do at Northwood and the things you would love us to be doing. We are going to offer these loves and longings to God, and they will be the basis upon which we re-build God's ministry here.