

## **On These Two Commandments**

Matthew 22:34-40

### **Reformation Sunday**

Do you know the name of our denomination? Then, let me ask you a question, “How many Methodists does it take to change a light bulb?” The answer is Twenty-two. One to hold the ladder, one to climb the ladder and change the bulb, ten to form three committees to evaluate the effectiveness of the old light bulb, and ten to form a committee for a pot-luck to welcome in the new light bulb. If you have ever attended Annual Conference, you will understand what I am saying. Last Saturday was the New England Annual Conference. To change some things, Methodists go through a long process. During the 2020 New England Annual Conference, there were amendments to amendments to amendments... so it was hard to figure out which amendment we were making to which amendment. I know it’s a necessary and important process but it felt like the United Methodists Church had become overly complex in its policies, rules and process of decision making. Perhaps, we need to remember that the spirit of Methodism is not that complicated.

Today is reformation Sunday. On this day, we celebrate the Protestant Reformation. On October 31, in 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. With this act, the unprecedented waves of Reformation of the church started. Methodists do not have direct relationship with Luther’s reformation but we share the same Protestant spirit. So, it may be helpful to know the family tree of our denomination.

Can you find the Methodist? [ppt] As you can see on the screen, all Christian churches are rooted in Jesus Christ. But as time passed, churches have been divided and new denominations have been formed. Sometimes, the church was divided because of political differences or human sinfulness. But sometimes, new Christian movements start out of a genuine passion for spiritual renewal. The Methodist Church was one.

The Methodist church comes from the Anglican church. Both John and Charles Wesley were priests in the Church of England. They realized the church of England had been too institutionalized and lost its spiritual power. So they started a Methodist Movement as a spiritual renewal movement within the Anglican church. They didn’t intend to form an independent Methodist denomination.

John Wesley lay out three simple rules for holy living. “Do no harm. Do good. Stay in Love with God.” John Wesley said, “these three rules help us love one God, and save many souls.” It’s very simple. But as time went on, the Methodist church became a complex institution with an 898 page-long Book of Discipline and a 873 page Book of Resolution. Does anybody want to read them for our book study? I guess not. Do we really need to know all those rules and policies for holy living? Maybe not.

### **Two Commandments**

Do you know how many commandments the Jewish people are to keep? 613 commandments, that includes 248 “positive commandments,” commandments to do, and 365 “negative commandments,” commandments, not to do. It seems that Methodism surely replicates its Jewish heritage. Why did the Israelites have so many laws and commandments?

Basically, commandments were given to guide holy living. For instance, The Fourth Commandment of the Ten Commandments is “Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.” When you read this commandment, the question of ‘how’ follows. Right? We know that we have

to keep the sabbath day holy and if so... how can we keep it holy? What unholy acts shouldn't we do on the sabbath day. So, commentary on this commandment was written and more detailed laws to guide how to keep the sabbath day holy emerged and the lists of commandments got longer and longer until it reached 613 when Jesus lived. Commandments were supposed to guide holy living but they had become a heavy burden and an oppressive tool to discriminate against the marginalized people.

But Jesus made it clear that our faith shouldn't be too complicated. When a lawyer asked, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'" Love is the center for our Christian faith. Love is the heart of Christianity.

### **Loving God and Loving our Neighbors**

The first commandment represents the vertical relationship between God and us. And the second commandment represents the horizontal relationship between people. And these two commandments are inseparable.

I believe all of you love your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. Right? What about your neighbors? Do you love your neighbors as yourselves? Most Christians feel loving our neighbors as ourselves is somewhat challenging and demanding. But we don't have to be Mother Theresa or Martine Luther King Jr. to love our neighbors. Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor says, the practice of loving our neighbors as ourselves begins with paying attention to "one of the people who sneak right past you because they are performing some mundane services such as taking your order or handing you your change."<sup>1</sup>

Think of how we treat the cashier when we go to the grocery store. After we've done our grocery shopping, we put our groceries on the checkout counter. A cashier normally says, "how are you doing?," and we habitually answer, "good. Thank you and you?" "Good." Mostly, that is the extent of the conversation and we wait until the cashier says, "your total is \$26 and 56 cents." We pay and leave the store ritualistically saying, "bye." But we don't really pay attention to the cashiers we meet. This is a trivial transaction between a customer and a cashier. Right? We don't often see them as our neighbors but only as a service provider.

But genuine encounters with people we meet can be a practice of loving our neighbors and it can influence others. My Korean clergy friend told me about his experience with a cashier. He served a church in Vermont and he and his wife were the only Koreans there. After moving to Vermont from Boston, he struggled to adjust to this new life. One day, he was a little down but needed to go grocery shopping. When he stood at the checkout counter, a cashier, an old lady, asked, "how are you doing?" So he just answered, "good" without looking at her. But she paused for a moment and look at him and asked, "How are you doing really?" And he felt that she really cared for him, not as a customer but as a human being. So they briefly chatted while checking out. It was a brief moment but my friend said, she completely changed his day. Loving your neighbors starts with seeing people as God sees them. So next time you go grocery shopping, see the name tag of your cashier. When they give you your grocery receipt, looking right at you, meet his or her eyes for a moment and say "thank you" and say their name. See them not as the cashier but as a person. This simple practice helps us meet others as people and our neighbors.

---

<sup>1</sup> An Alter in the World, 94.

### **Reformation for loving God and neighbors!**

Continual reformation is the heart of the Protestant church. John Wesley said, "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power." We need to reform ourselves to love our God and our neighbors. We need to reform our beloved Asbury UMC to lead souls to Christ. But the basis of our reformation is the love of God. God loves us first and because of God's love, we are able to love God and our neighbors.

As we all know, United Methodists have been divided and the United States also has been divided. What we need to heal this destructive division is love. So, try to see Trump supporters as persons whom God loves. See Biden supporters as persons whom God loves. See Methodists who oppose LGBTQI clergy ordination as your brothers and sisters. See Methodists who accept LGBTQI ordination as your brothers and sisters. Do you get what I mean? Loving is more important than winning. No matter whoever they are, hating our neighbors is not an option for Christians. When we continue to reform ourselves for love, nothing can ruin a loving relationship with our neighbors and God.

What we need is love! so let us love one another. Love our neighbors, the poor, the homeless, the addict, the documented and undocumented immigrants. What we need is love. Love people as they are because God first loves us. Be transformed by love and transform the world with love. Our God, who is love, will love you now and forever. Amen.