

Friendship Sunday – Mark 12:28-34
Friendship Sunday – special
Theme: Love is the Fulfilling of God’s Will (the Law)

Sermon
October 14, 2018

Dear Friends,

Have you ever arrived at junction in the highway and wondered, “*Which way do I go?*” If you are in a new city where you have never been before, you may be confused and concerned that you go the right way. Even though many younger people use GPS maps to guide them, it doesn’t eliminate all our doubts about the direction we are heading.

Every so often we come to what is called a “*fork in the road*” in our personal lives. When we graduate from high school, “Where do we go next?” If I have made a choice, is it the right one? In the in between years, you may consider a job or career change and there may be questions and doubts about which path to take. The when we retire from full time work and as we grow weaker in our later years, there are questions. “What will I do with myself?” “Where will I live?” “Who will take care of me?”

I chose the gospel reading from St. Mark specifically because Jesus answers our questions. He does not answer all of them, but he answers the most important ones. This will then help anytime we are trying to sort out our life and priorities. So today we consider this: **Jesus Graciously Answers Your Questions.** In doing this he shows us our priorities.

1. Who is God?

Instead telling us where to go in life, first he sends us to “someone.” He begins answering this man’s question, by directing him to the Lord God. **“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”** The Lord God is the divine being behind our purpose and decisions in life. So we have to ask, “Who is God?”

A. The Jewish people knew, because God had spoken to them in ancient times and the words had been written down by Moses and the Prophets in the Bible.

God or “**Elohim**” as he is known in Hebrew, created the world and human

life in six ordinary days. What that tells us is that God is all-powerful or Almighty.

The author of life wants us to listen to him, but, starting with the first humans there was a decision not to listen. A fallen angel, Satan deceived the first humans and they rebelled against God. Because of this rebellion, the whole world has come under the curse of sin and frustration. The curse from sin not only separates us from God's blessings in this life, but it should separate us from God's blessings for all eternity.

B. Jesus states that God is **“the Lord.”** How can he be our Lord if we have been separated from him by sin?

1. When the Jewish people went to church to hear about their God, they were reminded that the Lord, **“Yaweh”** in Hebrew, wants to reconcile humans to himself. In the Bible he calls people to repent of their sins. He calls people to trust in his plan to bring us into a right relationship with him. By faith the Lord is our God.

2. God's plan was to send a Savior into the world. He would win the forgiveness of sins and life with God. So Jesus told another teacher of the law, **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16)

C. What we are hearing is that God has unselfish love for selfish humans. So Jesus tells us, **“Hear, O Israel.”** The Jews and all of us are to listen to the story of God's love. God's love is our fuel for living our life. But we must regularly hear of that love, so that we don't forget. We must hear so that we understand better and better what a magnificent life God has given us. Then we can fulfill our purpose by living according to his will, his plan.

2. What does he want from us?

After hearing this, a natural question is, *“What does he want from us?”* This really what the teacher of the law was asking of Jesus. Jesus after reminding the people that God wants us to listen to him, now he lays out the priorities that God has for us.

A. Jesus indicates that we are to **“love.”** This is a very special love. The

word love that he uses is “**agape.**” This love is a love that gives and expects nothing in return. Whenever we hear about God’s love for us, it is “agape” love. God gives and demands nothing in return. So as he nudges us forward in life, he wants us, his children to love the same way. We are to love others and unselfishly, expect nothing in return.

1. This is foreign to our ears. Remember the old commercial by *Burger King*, “*Have it your way.*” Our flesh and the world urge us to get everything we can for ourselves. In the end people are miserable. We can never get enough. In the process of being selfish, we are unloving and hurtful toward others. This adds to our misery.

2. However, Christians have seen the unselfish and never-ending love of God. He not only gives us standing as a part of his family and citizenship in heaven, he promises to provide for our daily needs and to protect us. That love inspires and moves us to love others unselfishly.

B. The unselfish love that we are to practice has two targets. .

1. We are to love God. How? Jesus defines it using the words of Moses from the Bible, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.**” (30) [*Deut. 6:4,5*] This may sound like a huge task. It can be simple. The main thing is to listen to God’s word. The word is powerful. That word will move us and guide us to do the things that God wants. We learn of God. We confess our sins. We received his forgiveness. We worship him. This is God’s will.

2. We are to unselfishly love our neighbor. “**The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’**” [*Lev. 19:18*] (31) How? We are to love them as we love ourselves. People naturally want what is best for themselves. The Christian wants the same for the people around them and the people they meet. In Scriptures we hear of the Macedonian Christians taking up an offering for the poor in Jerusalem. We hear Dorcas making clothes for the poor. We hear of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, taking care of the sick and feeding the hungry. There are many things that we can do.

3. How are we saved?

The teacher of the law who had questioned Jesus seems like someone who is a child of God and is saved. Jesus words tell us that he is not. **“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”** He is not far away, but he is not in it. This leads us to ask the most important question, *“How are we saved?”*

A. What we learn from this man is that hearing the Word of God that is going to church and going through the motions is not enough.

1. The Scribe is a good man. We can assume that he went to the temple regularly. His recital of God’s word in verse 32 indicates that he listened to the word when it was read. But something was missing.

2. Jesus’ statement, **“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”** is and invitation to explore God’s word further. God’s word condemns all people who do not keep his commandments perfectly. Those same words speak of personal forgiveness in the Savior that God had promised.

B. The last part of verse 34 might seem like an after-thought by St. Mark, but it is very important. It says, **“And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.”** Why didn’t they dare ask Jesus any more questions?

1. Jesus had answered completely and perfectly. He always did this. Jesus listened when God said, **“Hear, O Israel!”** What you and I fail to do in being perfect, Jesus did. Jesus also paid for our sins at the cross. **“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”** (1 John 4:10)

2. Jesus rose from the dead and announced forgiveness and salvation for all who believe in him. The perfect love of our Savior enables us to show unselfish love for those around us.

C. When we come to church, we come for an important purpose. Here in worship we meet a holy God. We confess our failures and receive forgiveness in the name of Jesus. His love re-energizes us to live the meaningful life God has given us.

Conclusion: Do you have questions of Jesus? Please come to church and to Scripture. He has answers. His answers change our life. He has showed us our salvation. He continues to show how to live a happy and satisfying life. He does this because he graciously loves us. Amen.