

ALL SAINTS SUNDAY 11-4-2012

Scripture Lessons *Revelation 21:1-6a*
Mark 12:28-34

Sermon *Not Far From God's Kingdom*

I want to share with you today a short mediation on All Saints Day. My theory about living the Christian life is twofold. I think, on the one hand, of my first theory is that living the Christian life is simpler than any of us think it is. But on the other hand my second theory is, it is harder than it looks.

The case in point is this message from Mark's Gospel for this morning. Now imagine something with me. If suddenly every single Bible on the planet spontaneously combusted; spontaneously burned to ashes, leaving only these seven verses. I believe these seven verses contain everything that Jesus taught his disciples, needed to know about the Christian life. Let me explain. When asked by the scribe in the story to come up with the commandment which is first of all, Jesus immediately pulled not from the more familiar 10 commandments but instead messages in more obscure places in what he knew in his Bible in that day to form a new two-part great commandment which is a summary of everything, I think is the best in the whole Judeo-Christian tradition.

What it said is that is simple about these passages that Jesus pulled together for us this morning. Well, simply put, living the Christian Life is about love; loving God; loving others. What Jesus said in essence that living a Christian life is not about belief; not about the Bible; it is not about ethics; it is not about how many points we rack up; it is not even about whether the acolyte had socks on that morning or not in church. It is about love. It is about loving the Creator of the universe loving the pinnacle of God's creation which is our fellow human beings. And all that sounds simple doesn't it. I think I will sit down at this point.

But that's where the hard part of the theory comes in. I had a college roommate at Whitworth who used to say this, "I don't have any problem of loving God's creation; it is the people I hate." Isn't that the essence of the problem, recognizing and saying that our life together is about love is only the beginning of the battle that we face in living the Christian life. It is the loving itself that presents the greatest challenge of all for each of us on a daily basis.

I think that is where the rest of the Bible and, our belief and, our ethics, or even sometimes whether the acolyte had socks on or not, come in. For all of these things form us and guide us on this lifelong quest to love God and to love our neighbor. And God knows we need all the help we can get to fulfill Jesus' commandment to love. And so it is simple. And at the same time it is complicated to live the Christian life and love as Jesus answered the scribe in the story from Mark's Gospel for this morning.

But one thing is for certain, we have to try. We have to put forth some effort. And some days I am not certain that many of us as Christian have gotten that far along the path way. When Jesus saw that the scribe got it when it came to understanding about the priority of love, he said these interesting words, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." I hope and my prayer today is that there is a whole roomful of people this morning in the Newport United Church of Christ that have gotten it and they are not far from the Kingdom of God this morning

Together we say Amen.