

Jesus is in the same place as last week's reading; in Jerusalem at the temple. In most of the New Testament the Jewish leaders of the day are cast in an "anti-Jesus" light, but the scribe in this reading is an exception.

Jesus is debating with the Sadducees and the scribe is impressed by Jesus' answers to their tricky questions and sincerely asks Jesus his own question, "Which commandment is the greatest of all?" Jesus didn't hesitate, immediately responding quoting scripture Deuteronomy 6:4-5, known as the Shema, "Hear of Israel the Lord your God is one, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." Shema is the Hebrew word meaning hear, the first word in the reading. The Shema is a keystone a prayer and a confession of faith. It is a likely response to the scribe's question. But unexpectedly Jesus continues, telling what he believes is the second most important commandment from Leviticus 19:18, "you should love your neighbor as yourself."

Even in Jesus day it was understood that loving God meant also caring for your neighbor so this second most important commandment could have been assumed by stating the first but Jesus was not content with "love of neighbor" be left to assumption. Instead Jesus is explicit about the importance of loving your neighbor. Jesus answer to the question about the "greatest commandment" rules out any religious practices that neglect the needs of fellow humans. Jesus will have nothing to do with a religiosity that is only Godward. Jesus believes social-justice, loving neighbor, is indistinguishable from loving God. It's like 1John 4:20

says, "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar."

I want to be clear: God's love for us isn't **dependent** on what we do or don't do. God doesn't stop loving us when they don't follow God's commands. Similar to how a parent tells their child, "I will always love you. Nothing you do could make me love you any more or less. I love you completely." There are many times when parents don't love what their children have done, but their love for the child is unchanged. Even more true with God's love for us. What Jesus is doing in connecting love of God and love of neighbor is being clear about how you can love God and what loving God looks like; loving God looks like loving your neighbor, like justice for your neighbor. God is focused on the neighbor.

In the great commandment Jesus says we are to love God with our heart, mind and strength; or how we might say it—with body, mind and spirit. Body, mind and spirit are commonly words we would use to describe our entire person. Jesus says we should worship God with our body, mind and spirit... our entire being. We know that we are not three separate parts but rather our body, mind and spirit are knit together. Disease in our body effects our mind and spirit. Learning in our minds effects our body and spirit and joy in our spirit effects our body and minds. They are all connected; health is about our entire being. In order to be healthy—our body, minds and spirits all need attention. This Sunday as we focus on health with the Heath Fair and our speakers are talking about brain injuries and super bugs.

There is one dimension of health I would like to connect with this reading and Brene Brown's book *Daring Greatly* that we are reading during Lent. Brene tells about the masks/armor we use to hide our true-selves from the world, one of those masks is perfectionism. The question that helps me understand perfectionism is, "What will people think?" When we ask this question aloud or silently we engaging in the act of perfectionism—trying to manage perceptions, hiding our flaws and wanting to win people over. Perfectionism is a disease of our body, mind and spirit. It greatly effects our health.

God doesn't ask for perfection God calls for *tov*, the Hebrew word meaning good that is found in the first creation story in Bible. In this creation story God calls us to participate in the messy process of creation; we are called to be and do *tov*. We are called to claim the truth about who we are, where we come from and what we believe... we are called to claim our imperfect nature. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we know that God forgives our sin and that forgiveness frees us and calls us to give ourselves a break, to forgive ourselves, to appreciate the beauty of our imperfections. Perfectionism is a sin that takes life and robs us of our health.

You might have heard the saying, "You can't give what you don't have." The truth of this saying is obvious, but it is a saying because we often forget the wisdom, we forget the obvious truth that if we don't have something we can't give it: if we don't have love we can't give love; if we don't have health we can't give health.

God calls us to be kind and gentle with ourselves because that is the birthplace of being kind and gentle to others. Part of loving God with all our body, mind and spirit is loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. We can't give what we don't have. We need to talk to ourselves the way we would talk to someone we care about.

Loving ourselves is connected to loving our neighbors which is connected to loving God, which is connected to the health of our body, mind and spirit which is connected to... really rooted in God's love. We find our forgiveness, we find our freedom from perfectionism, and we find our "enough" in Jesus. It is Jesus love that gives us the power to love ourselves, our neighbors and God. Jesus love is the foundation on which we stand, the water we swim in, the air we breathe. So breathe deeply, breathe deep the love of God.