

**Rev. Dr. Stephen Wigley**

**BEWARE OF THE MAN WITH NO CLOTHES - WHO COMES TO OFFER YOU HIS SHIRT**

**Text: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... ‘Love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39)**

**Reading: Matthew 22:34-40**

**Hymn: Christ, from whom all blessings flow (StF 676)**

It is good to be able to share this message with you; in these uncertain times to affirm our faith in God, and at a time when so many plans are changing to trust in God’s unchanging love. This Sunday is the 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary time but the truth is there are no ‘ordinary’ times now! Our Bible readings take us right to the heart of our faith, found here in Jesus’ summary of law and prophets; we are called to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and to love our neighbour as ourself.

It is worth noting that Jesus’ summary comes in response to a challenge, a tricky question from a lawyer; moreover it follows a series of encounters where the scribes and pharisees are trying to catch Jesus out (on collaboration with the Romans (Is it lawful to pay tax to Caesar?) and understanding of resurrection.)

It is also worth noting that Jesus’ response is to quote from the Hebrew Scriptures, from the Torah; the commandment to love God AND to love your neighbour are both found in the book of Leviticus, chapter 19. Jesus’ summary is taken right from the heart of Jewish faith and tradition from which he came. This is important, because sometimes there is a suggestion that the Law as set out in the Old Testament is all about loving and worshiping God and it is Jesus who comes to ‘add’ the love of neighbour. This is not true; both are equally important also in the Jewish faith.

Now in Matthew’s Gospel, this question is followed by a discussion about authority, in particular a debate about whether Jesus is the Messiah. It takes a complex theological turn in terms of discussing the interpretation of Psalm 2; ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you...’ and it is not an easy one to follow. However, in Luke’s account, this exchange is followed by a story; in response to a lawyer wanting to justify himself by asking the tricky question ‘Who is my neighbour?’ Jesus goes on to tell story of Good Samaritan.

The truth is that both commandments are very practical; for loving God is not just about keeping the law, reading the Bible, and attending worship; it’s also about loving and cherishing all the things dear to God. It means if God is loving, faithful and just, so should we be; we should care for God’s justice to prevail, live out the

importance of truth-telling and integrity, show in our lives the importance of love and compassion.

And though it is often forgotten, there is also a third person to be found in Jesus' summary. He reminds us that 'You shall love God (with all your heart, soul and mind) and 'You shall love your neighbour as YOURSELF'.

To love God and our neighbour, also means that we need to have a proper care and concern for OURSELVES. I wonder if sometimes, especially in these pressurised uncertain days, some of us can find this hard; we can struggle to love and cherish ourselves as those who are loved and redeemed by God in Christ.

13) Sometimes we can divert all our attention onto pressing issues & other people but ignore our own need for grace. I recall an apocryphal West African proverb told by the celebrated poet and performer Maya Angelou which goes like this: **'BEWARE OF THE MAN WITH NO CLOTHES - WHO COMES TO OFFER YOU HIS SHIRT.'**

For me, that proverb stands alongside Jesus' teaching; for it reminds us that we too are part of the economy of grace; that the God who calls us to love him and cherish all that he has made, also wants us to love ourselves, because only then will we be able to love and care for our neighbour as Jesus calls us to do. Amen.