



(Disciples of Christ)
210 North Fifth Street
Ponca City, Oklahoma

All Saints Sunday

November 1, 2009

Ruth 1:1-18; Psalm 146;
Hebrews 9:11-14; Mark 12:28-34
the Rev. Larry B Metzger, pastor



Burnt offerings and sacrifices are something rather strange to us. We don't do observe those ancient practices. There are still religions that do practice one or both.

Sacrifice is the giving up of something that is valuable or important and typically it was the slaying of an animal in the temple to substitute for a human sacrifice to the gods.

Burnt offerings were similar in that they were smells rising up from the earth for the pleasure of the gods. The ritual was observed in a particular way with the intention to please the gods by following the steps and seeking perfection.

Doing the ritual incorrectly could displeased the gods. This scribe knew about the importance of rituals but that the love of God and neighbor was far more important.

Many interpretations of this passage begin with the posture of distrust. They begin with the notion the scribe is out to trick Jesus.

Why is it we have to always have a winner and a loser? It seems so often we must begin a discussion with the notion of proving or disproving something.

The scribe, in the days of the Hebrew monarchy was a title of the court, like the secretary of state. Then the scribe became a title for one who studied the Torah, the law and transcribed, or wrote it down. In particular, they copied a text word for word.

In the time of Jesus, the scribe would be often referred to as a lawyer or teacher. So the ones who copied the scripture also were the ones who studied it.

I often think of copying a page by hand simply a task of replicating what I see; i.e, just copy what I see. It was far more complicated and required strict attention to detail.

For example:



When the Jews returned to Jerusalem from Babylon after about 70 years in exile, Ezra recovered a copy of the Torah and read it aloud to the whole nation. As more copies were created, the scribes had a process to follow.

(The following is from Easton's Bible Dictionary, originally published in 1897.)

1. They could only use clean animal skins, both to write on, and even to bind manuscripts.
2. Each column of writing could have no less than forty-eight, and no more than sixty lines.
3. The ink must be black, and of a special recipe.
4. They must verbalize each word aloud while they were writing.
5. They must wipe the pen and wash their entire bodies before writing the word "Jehovah," every time they wrote it.
6. There must be a review within thirty days, and if as many as three pages required corrections, the entire manuscript had to be redone.
7. The letters, words, and paragraphs had to be counted, and the document became invalid if two letters touched each other. The middle paragraph, word and letter must correspond to those of the original document.
8. The documents could be stored only in sacred places (synagogues, etc).
9. As no document containing God's Word could be destroyed, they were stored, or buried, in a genizah.

The process ceased after the first century and the Torah was transcribed into Greek and Latin.

The scribe was a deeply religious person. Imagine copying a scroll, word for word, the time involved and also contemplating what one is writing. They must have taken great pride in their work and dedicated to getting it right.

Instead of seeing the scribe as one who is out to trick Jesus by asking him a question about the law, maybe he was actually interested in hearing what it was Jesus thought was the greatest of the 613 commandments.

Jesus' response seems to be one that affirms the conversation with the scribe. The scribe is impressed with Jesus and engages in a discussion of his response. I do not see it as adversarial, but rather as collegial relationship. And this may be some of the impetus to rid the faith of this itinerate teacher. He was making sense to other rabbis.

They agreed on the importance of loving God and neighbor.

Today the question comes squarely to us: What does it mean to love God with all our hearts, minds, soul and strength.

To love with our heart is to love with affection. When one says they love another, it is a deep feeling that causes delight, but also causes pain when the principle of our love is in pain. Husbands and wives, parents, children and even pet owners know the meaning of the word love that is from the heart.

To love with the soul is a bit illusive for we Protestants are not sure about the soul. But to say soul is to imply that deep inner sense of the holy. We love God as holy, sacred and even mysterious. In spite of the things we do not know about God; i.e., the mysteries that are beyond our explanations, we love God for the mystery.

To love God with all our minds is a little tricky. There are faith groups that believe that education is anti-religious. In other words, the more we learn about the universe, the more it stands in contradiction to a belief in God. Evolution is an example. However, I would submit loving God with our whole mind means we use our intelligence as best we are able to love one another. It is the mind that is capable of discovering ways to help the poor, the lame, the weak, the imprisoned.



To love God with all our strength is also required. The Greek word means muscle like strength; the Hebrew word is more at inner source of fortitude. It may mean when our minds tell us something different; when our soul is in despair; when our hearts are broken; we muster all the strength we have and love God. When humanity seems a lost cause, we draw on our strength to not give up.

Tom Troeger, who teaches preaching at Iliff Seminary in Denver, has written many new hymns and poems. This one was written for this passage in Mark:

If all you want, Lord, is my heart,
my heart is yours alone –
providing I may set apart
my mind to be my own.

If all you want, Lord, is my mind,
my mind belongs to you,
but let my heart remain inclined
to do what it would do.

If heart and mind would both suffice,
while I kept strength and soul,
at least I would not sacrifice
completely my control.

But since, O God, you want them all
to shape with your own hand,
I pray for grace to heed your call
to live your first command.

Now this is not the Place of God; this is not Paradise; but when we are able to love God with our heart, mind, soul and might; then we are not far from God's Home.

