

Mark 12:28-34

Our Vows

Sunday October 8th, 2017

Recently I have been thinking again about the Church being the body of Christ and how each of us is a member of that body.



I have been thinking about how intricately we are connected to each other through the worship of God and our membership vows.

I have been thinking about how intricately we are connected and how important the almost invisible people in our congregation are to the health of the whole body.

A while back I read the story of famous hand surgeon who was known for his skill in reattaching severed hands and fingers. He “remembered” people as I spoke about last week. He would not work with people who were smokers for he found that smoking even one cigarette would close down the almost invisible capillaries that were needed to make the reattachment of a limb successful.

One of his patients found out very tragically that, yes, even one cigarette mattered. The doctor had at first refused to do the surgery because the patient smoked. The patient though convinced him he wouldn’t smoke during the healing process, but one day thought, “just one cigarette won’t matter.” It did. The man smoked just one cigarette and thus lost his hand because the smallest and most invisible of all the veins closed down.

The Bible says, **“To each one is given a gift of the Spirit for the Good of all.”** We must practice our gifts, we must be present within the body, or the whole body of Christ suffers.

The word “membership” comes from being a “member” in the Body of Christ and we need to examine our lives to see if we are using our

gifts to serve the Body. Last week I reminded everyone that in Holy Communion we not only remember Christ, but are re-membered into his Body. And today we are reminded no matter how small our gifts seem; they are important!!

Today we are beginning our annual stewardship campaign with an overview of our membership vows. And we are also at the very beginning of our Capital raising for our new building program that you will hear more about in the coming months.

Part of a stewardship campaign is taking a good look at ourselves and how we are taking care of what God has given us. How are we being a good member/steward of the gifts God has given us in the Body of Christ? How are we taking care of the vows we made to God when we joined the church?

A steward is one who has been given the authority and responsibility (stewardship) to take care of something for someone else. In our case it's a pretty big someone else. It's God!



Now I mentioned the capillaries. Here's another small part of the body. It is the "stapes" ear bone. It is also referred to as the "stirrup bone" because it looks like a stirrup. In the picture it is the smallest bone next to the dime. It is actually the smallest bone in the body. It is about 1/10 of an inch long.

Small, seemingly insignificant and hidden, but we couldn't hear without it. **You and your gifts are vitally important to the health of the Body of Christ!!!** You and your vows are vitally important to your spiritual health and the health of the Church.

In our scripture story today, Jesus was in another extremely hostile political and religious situation. He had just answered two very hostile questions. One was religious, about marriage, and the other political,

about taxes, and if he misspoke, he wouldn't just be voted out of office; He would be killed. In fact, that was the intent of His questioners.

Into this tense, hostile situation came a scribe who you would have thought also would have been hostile to Jesus, but seeing Jesus' wisdom, he asks a sincere, genuine question: **"Which commandment is the greatest of all?"**

Now in the Judaism of Jesus' day there were two tendencies. One was to expand the Law limitlessly into thousands of laws, and the other to reduce it, to gather it all up into one general statement or sentence, which is what Jesus did.

Jesus took two existing laws and turned them into one.

First was the "Shema", **"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your hearts, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."** Deuteronomy 6:4-5

The second is the **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"**. Leviticus 19:18

Then Jesus said, **"There is no greater commandment than these."** Notice the phrasing, "There is no greater commandment" note "commandment" is in the singular. Two laws become one.

I don't have enough time to emphasize the centrality of the Shema for Judaism, but it is as basic and fundamental as is Christians teaching that "Jesus loves you". All synagogue worship services to this day begin with the Shema.

What was unique in what Jesus said is that He combined these two laws into one. In Matthew 22:39, it states these are of equal importance. In Luke, there is no break between the two and here they are of equal value. They become one.

If you are able to bring yourself to pay attention to any of the political ads and interviews today you can grasp the hostility behind the question, but Jesus of course gives an answer that no one can dispute.

He also in this answer gives us the core of worshipping God and living out lives of faith and service.

Let's look at this scripture laid out like this:

Love the Lord your God with

All your heart

All you mind

All your soul &

All your strength

And love your neighbor as yourself.

As they say God wants us "all in." Does God want just part of our love, heart, mind, soul and strength? Does God want us to just partially love our neighbor? No! God wants it all dedicated to him; given by him to us to take care of as stewards/members of his Body.

When we do this we worship God. When we live out the Great Commandment we make our whole lives an act of worship. We become what the Bible asks of us to be "a living sacrifice for God." We are "all in!"

How much of our income should we dedicate to God? Just like our lives, 100%!! How much should we give to God's work here on earth through his Body? The goal is 10%, which is a pretty good deal, but when you can't give a full 10% start somewhere with a portion or percentage.

Now I want to touch briefly on why our membership vows are so important. They actually encourage us in the love and worship of God and the love of neighbor, the fulfilling of the Greatest Commandment.

When we become "members" an arm, a leg, an ear bone or a hair on the body of Christ we promise to do the following for the Body.

We promise to support the Body/Church with our:

Prayers
Presence
Gifts
Service
Witness

When we do these things we prosper personally as a Christians and we actually fulfill the Great Commandment. Note how these are connected to the scripture and you can find these under the sermon notes:

“Love the Lord your God with”

	Connected to	
<u>All</u> your heart	>	Witness
<u>All</u> your mind	>	Prayers
<u>All</u> your soul	>	Presence
<u>All</u> your strength	>	Gifts
Love your neighbor.	>	Service

If you are fulfilling your membership vows you are also fulfilling the Great Commandment. If you are not fulfilling your membership vows you are not fulfilling either!!! Let’s examine this briefly as an introduction to our stewardship series on our Membership Vows.

All your heart > Witness

Briefly, when you love God with all your heart you will be witnessing the love of God to others. God wants everyone in this world to know of his love. If we give all of our heart to God, God will **open the eyes of our hearts** to see the lost that His heart breaks over.

As our hearts are filled with love this love will overflow into love for each other and love for those in the world. And it won’t be just warm feelings. It will be actions like the \$11,000 plus dollars we raised for hurricane disaster relief. We witness through our words and actions.

The eyes of our hearts have been opened to the spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters up the Copper Trail. We intend to reach out to

them through our live streaming and bring the Methodist flavor of the worship and Christian fellowship to these communities. Our Annual Conference has loved this idea so much they sent us \$10,000 to advance this way of spreading the Gospel, of witnessing.

More on Witnessing will come on All Saints Sunday as we celebrate the witness of our Saints, who have gone home to God. It is up to us as members of Christ's physical body here on earth to go and tell and show God's love. As they say, "If not you, then who?"

All your mind > Prayers

It is with our minds we pray! It is with our minds we practice the presence of God and meditate on scripture! It's with our minds we meditate on the problems of the world and seek God given solutions. If you can worry you can meditate and if you can meditate and lay these burdens at the feet of Jesus you can pray. Our world is in need of lots of prayer and meditation for evil seems to surround us at times and randomly take the lives of the innocent.

All your soul > Presence

Wherever we are present our souls are present. I was reminded once that the excuse we often hear, "I can't be there, but I will be with you in spirit" is rather meaningless. Our spirits, our souls are wherever our bodies are. Are our bodies and spirits in worship? Are our bodies and spirits in fellowship? If not, then why not?

In two weeks I will address more deeply both prayer and presence together. We practice this every week in worship as we lift up the joys and concerns of members of the congregation. Next Sunday is Laity Sunday and John Witt will bring the 10am message on the Reformation, and I will bring the message at the 1pm Contemporary service on being "Born from Above."

All your strength > Gifts

It is with the strength of our bodies, our health that we raise the money to support us and our lives. It is with the same money that we support the work of the Body of Christ here on earth. The Stewardship program that we are involved in challenges us with proportional or percentage giving. The ultimate goal is the tithe, 10 %, but we got to start somewhere and for some it's at ½ percent or less. But it is through our strength we give our gifts.

Love your neighbor > Service

Finally, “Love your neighbor as yourself”. This is the membership vow of “service” that we are look at in 3 weeks. Vista Church is very good at living out this membership goal. Currently we have 16 different hands on mission outreaches that we support. In the first 9 months of 2017 we have raised over \$53,000 dollars for mission and we have provided everything from hurricane relief to food and beds for homeless women.

Love, faith, belief and worship are all active, action oriented words in the Christian faith. Feeling has much less to do with them than commitment and action. So to act out our faith and worship for God; we must actively serve our neighbor.

So as you can see our membership vows are not randomly selected, but based on the sound Biblical teachings of Jesus. To do them is to live. To do them is to come close to Jesus. I don't know if you noticed Jesus' response to the Scribe after he answered Jesus. Jesus said to him, **“You are not far from the Kingdom of God.”** He wasn't told he was in the Kingdom, but not far.

For him and for us to enter the Kingdom is to follow Jesus. The Kingdom and its promise was right in front of that Scribe and all it would have taken for him to enter it was to follow Jesus. Over the next several weeks we will explore our vows and how as we fulfill them we follow Jesus into the Kingdom.

What is God Saying to you and what will you do? Will you repent and believe? Will you turn to God in Christ and follow? In Jesus' name, amen.