

The 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
October 11, 2009  
Deut. 10:12-21 • 1 Cor. 1:1-9 • Matt. 22:34-46

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They are questions asked of every Lutheran at confirmation. (And we'll hear them asked again, of our adult confirmands, in the later service today.)

- Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully?
- Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?
- Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?

In other words, (in the words of today's Gospel), "Do you *love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind?*" And does your intention "to live according to the Word of God" (that you promised at your confirmation), also include an intention to "love your neighbor as yourself"? Because confirmation and being a member of the Church is not merely a mental exercise. Nor is it about a superficial faith that is disconnected from everyday life.

Rather, the Christian life is about faith active in love. It's about getting our priorities straight. It entails God's call to put Him first—always, in every decision, in every action... putting God first, above what is convenient, comfortable, fun, or even safe. "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" This is the first and greatest commandment. You shall earnestly intend "to hear the Word of God and receive His Supper faithfully" because you love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind. You shall not let anything get in the way of this—job, children, recreation, stress, schedules, bitterness, disappointment—nothing!

And, loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, you shall strive always "to live according to the Word of God"—which includes the second greatest commandment: to love your neighbor as yourself.

- Submit to those in authority over you (with respect). Obey your leaders without grumbling.
- Help others who have any physical need. Sacrifice your time, money, and personal relaxation to support them.
- Honor, love, and cherish your spouse despite his or her shortcomings; and lead a sexually pure life (at every age), saving God's gift of sexuality exclusively for the estate of marriage.
- Don't take what is not rightfully yours, nor use your cleverness to bend the rules.
- Don't say false things about other people to make them look bad (or yourself look better) in the eyes of others.
- And don't be jealous of what other people have been given by God, wishing it were yours, if God hasn't given it to you.

Jesus said, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*”

Speaking for the Lord in today’s Old Testament reading, from Deuteronomy chapter 10, Moses says something very similar:

*“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?... Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.... Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him.”*

This is the life that every Lutheran signs onto at his confirmation. This is the life that every Christian enters in Holy Baptism. This is God’s holy, good, and just will for you: to love Him with all your heart, and to love your neighbor as yourself. No bounds! No limits! Just love, without end!

But who can do it? If anyone isn’t crushed at hearing these two commandments on which all the Law and Prophets depend, then maybe he should pinch himself to see if he is alive. Whether it’s with respect to our attitude toward God, or our attitude toward others, or both, we constantly come up short of God’s holy, good, and just will for us. We are masters at putting ourselves first (rather than God and neighbor), at justifying ourselves, coming up with excuses, throwing up smoke screens, or just plain ignoring God’s command to love Him above all things, and other people as ourselves.

And that’s why the second part of today’s Gospel text is so important, where Jesus asked the Pharisees, “*What do you think about the Christ?*”

What do you think about the Christ? This is the crucial question, isn’t it? Because at the end of the day, and in fact every moment of every day, an honest appraisal of our life and situation makes it apparent that we fall woefully short of loving God above all things, and our neighbor as ourselves.

So what do you think about the Christ?

Here’s what God’s Word declares to you about the Christ: He is the One who has stepped into your shoes, into your skin, into your human nature, and perfectly fulfilled the law of God in your place! He loved God, his heavenly Father, with all his heart, and with all his soul and with all his mind. And He loved His neighbor—all His neighbors, you His neighbor—as Himself! Jesus Christ’s love for the Father led Him in obedience to a cross outside of Jerusalem (at the end of His perfect life of obedience)... a cross where His love for you led Him to lay down His life for your sins.

And because this sinless Son of God has redeemed the world by His suffering and death, you have been blessed to be called by the Gospel. You are being called yet again today by the preaching of the Gospel Word of God! *“The Lord has set his heart in love on you... and has chosen you as your are this day!”* While we were still sinners, Christ died for us!

So keep on loving the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and mind. Keep on loving your neighbor as yourself. (And when you fail, repent, and amend your sinful ways.) This is God’s will for you and me. This is the summary of His Commandments to us.

But as often as your are crushed by your sin... at the end of each day, when you reflect over all your failures to “live according to the Word of God,” know and believe that you are forgiven in Jesus Christ! Cling to His Gospel promise that He has done it all for you!... that His perfect life has been reckoned to you, by faith!... and His innocent blood has made you pure and holy in God’s sight!

Let this be your hope, comfort, and joy *as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ!*