

**PENTECOST:
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 26

November 1, 2009

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Psalm 119:1-8

Hebrews 9:11-14

Mark 12:28-34

Complex Questions—Simple Answers

One of my predecessors here at Wilton Baptist told a story once about a difficult time he was having in ministry. In an attempt to find some help, he went to a long-time mentor, whom he deeply respected. After traveling across the country to meet with this spiritual advisor of sorts, he finally asked his question: "Of all your years in ministry working with church people, what's the most profound thing that you have come to realize?" His search for wisdom and help had culminated in this question, this moment, and now this answer. His mentor remained silent for a few minutes before answering. This only heightened my colleague's expectation of the profound. And, finally, the answer from the sage; the quest was ended. "People Are Funny." That's it? Nothing else? People are funny.

Something similar happens in our Gospel passage from Mark 12:28-34. A scribe came to Jesus and asked a profound and important question: "Which commandment is the first of all?" (verse 29, *RSV*). If you are familiar with the Old Testament, then you know how many commandments there are – A LOT! It's like asking a chef what her or his favorite food is! Jesus refers to what is still the bedrock of Judaism – the *Shema*: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD, and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5, *RSV*). This is still sung in Hebrew at every Bar mitzvah and Bat mitzvah. In other words, Jesus didn't rock the world with his answer. He followed it up with Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus did not say anything new or radical in his response. Jesus' response would be similar to a great sage saying, "People are funny."

These answers may initially feel unsettling, or worse disappointing! Yet, when you take this advice to heart, you begin to see the profundity of its message. In other words, the answer – sometimes – is that simple. In church life, it is essential to remember that *people are funny*. Allowing this to anchor your relationships certainly gives you permission to grant a lot of grace and receive a lot of grace.

Likewise, loving God and neighbor seems simple enough. Putting this into *real* practice is a whole different story. Sometimes the simplest ideas are the hardest to put into practice! So, with all of our strength and courage, let's remember to love God and each other, since most *people are funny*.

This week's Reflection was prepared by the Rev. K. Jason Coker, an ordained minister with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and pastor of Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Connecticut. Visit www.wiltonbaptist.org to learn more about the ministries of Wilton Baptist Church.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Indonesia – With thanks to God for the publication of ten Bibles and Scripture editions in various languages, and with prayers for God to bless the people involved in this work as well as those who receive the Scriptures, and with prayers for the ongoing translation and revision work and for the radio project which will broadcast God's Word across Indonesia, and with prayers for God's blessing on the Literacy and New Reader program; **South Pacific** – With prayers for Bible work in these islands; **Papua New Guinea** – With thanks to God for the new Bible Society office and for the long-awaited connection of communication cables, and with prayers for the Executive Secretary and staff as they strive to develop and distribute Scriptures in different formats and versions to meet the needs of the diverse people; **Philippines** – With thanks to God for Scripture engagement work among relocated families and members of the Judiciary, Armed Forces, Coast Guard, Police and Fire Protection services, and for the Youth Explosion program, and with prayers for celebrations this year to mark the Bible Society's 110th anniversary, the centennial of the Ilocano Bible, and National Bible Week, with prayers for a fundraising project to enable the distribution of five million Bibles to Catholics over five years, and with prayers for the people of the Philippines and other islands in the Asia-Pacific region as they seek to recover from the recent devastating floods and typhoons that have occurred.

Activity Corner: "The Shema"

Supplies needed: Bible; 3" x 5" index cards (or writing paper); pens or pencils; construction paper and heart-shaped pattern (for younger children).

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9. Why are the words in verses 4 and 5 so important? What instructions are given to help one remember these words? Encourage members of your household to copy Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5 on an index card and to memorize these Bible verses. On the reverse side of the card, ask each one to list ways they can live out these verses. Younger children may be encouraged to trace and cut out a heart and to copy Deuteronomy 6:5 in the center of the heart.