

“The Greatest Tweet”

Matthew 22:34-40

Confirmation Celebration

October 25, 2020

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“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

- Matthew 22:36

Prayer of Preparation

O Lord, teach us what is great about your love, and instruct us in the ways of your Son Jesus Christ, in whose kingdom we live and move and have our being: Amen.

Meditation

I have entitled this sermon the greatest tweet: Jesus’s 74 character instruction to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.¹ In this concise summary of the law and the prophets, Jesus gives us the center of the Christian mission about who he is, backing it up with his own life.

That is to say, Jesus does not just tell us that God loves us, and that we are to love God, but that he truly shows us that this is what love looks like, by going to the cross and obeying God to the end. Indeed, if Jesus were *tweeting* today, he could not have made it more to the point.

But what I find interesting about this passage is how we forget the context in which Jesus is teaching, and the pressure Jesus is under.

Jesus is in a debate with the Sadducees and Pharisees about how to interpret the Scriptures: they are arguing paying taxes (vv.16-22) and the resurrection of the dead (vv.23-33). The Pharisees are trying to trip him up, and it doesn’t seem to be working. In fact, if we were viewing this exchange as a tennis match, with Jesus

¹ Thanks to Homiletics Online for these insights on tweeting; cf., ‘The Greatest Tweet’ at www.homileticsonline.com.

and the religious folks volleying back and forth, we would notice how Jesus's returns have put the match on ice – game, set, and match!²

The Pharisees do not know what to say; there is no tweet that the Pharisees can send out to get a reaction!

Social Media

And maybe that is not such a bad thing! After all, if you have ever been on social media lately, whether twitter, or Facebook or Instagram, you realize that it is *not* always the kind of platform conducive to having thoughtful discussions.

If anything, social media, along with the rise of other forms of media – like twenty-four-seven cable news – only tends to reinforce what we already think. Sociologists call this phenomenon living in a 'social bubble' or in a 'media silo.' It typically refers to how we spend time sharing views with persons who think the way we think. For example, researchers at the University of Georgia have found that Twitter-users are more than likely *not* to be exposed to content from other perspectives because they follow Twitter-users who simply think as they think.

This only creates a feedback loop where people can hide behind a mask of anonymity, where there is little to no accountability for what people say.³ It can also become a breeding ground for contempt and deception.

What fascinates me is how social media in general and Twitter in particular is changing how we communicate with each other.⁴ For example, the average tweet is usually about 33 characters. That means that we had better make our point and make it clear, whether it is funny, profound, or provocative. One tweet might say something funny like 'Everyone says to follow your dreams, so I did. I went back to bed.' Short.

Or a tweet might say something profound like 'The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.' Profound.

The President of the United States, of course, tweets, and most celebrities tweet. Recently, the singer Cher wrote a tweet that said 'I need to shoot my phone.'

Like it or not, the tweet has become a powerful form of communication.

² N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone – Volume 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2004), 93.

³ Arthur Brooks, *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from the Culture of Contempt* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2019), 30.

⁴ 'Exit Strategy' in *Fast Company* (November 2019) at www.fastcompany-digital.com.

Jesus on Twitter?

It makes me wonder, though, if Jesus would have tweeted in the first century. Jesus might have been, as I said a moment ago, the greatest master of the tweet. In just a few words, he answers a difficult theological question, asked by a teacher of the law (Matthew 22:34). The reason it is a difficult question is it puts Jesus in a bind.

When the lawyer asks Jesus which of the laws is the greatest, it appears that Jesus can answer in one of two ways. First, he can share that only one of the commandments is the greatest, which will lead the Pharisees to accuse him of ignoring the other commandments; or, second, he can say that all the commandments are great, which will lead the Pharisees to accuse him of being weak and not actually answering the question.

Of course, Jesus could have said that all the Ten Commandments were important. He could have said that the Book of Leviticus was the most important expression of God's law. He would have been on good ground. He could also have said the first five books of the Bible – the Torah – contained everything people needed to know about God's salvation.

But Jesus takes a different route: what Jesus does is give a tweet-sized response. He says, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the greatest commandment. And a second it is like: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (vv. 37-39).

In 74 characters, Jesus says, the whole things hangs (v. 40). Case closed. Match over. The Greatest Tweet. The Greatest Commandment!

Vocation and Mission – Confirmation

In our Confirmation Class, we spent time reviewing and remembering the Great Commandment, along with the Ten Commandments, and the Great Requirement from the prophet Micah (6:8), and the Great Commission from the Gospel of Matthew (28:16-20).

The Great Requirement from the prophet Micah is tweet-sized and easy to remember. The Great Commission is where Jesus commands the disciples to go into the world and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything he did and said. We could tweet all these! But more importantly we need to be doing them! After all, that is what Jesus is doing! He is not simply communicating

these messages. He is not simply preaching and teaching. He is not simply counseling. No, he is *doing* what he is actually *saying*! He is *backing up* what he is *tweeting* by what he is *doing*. *And what he is doing is loving-in-action.*

The center of Jesus' life and ministry, the center of his mission, the center of the kingdom he is building up – is loving in action, or simply put, love! Four characters. Tweet it! Put it on Facebook! Email it!⁵ But above all, do it!

That is what Jesus is saying and doing: by naming his center, Jesus reveals something not only about himself, but also about God. God's law, God's way, finally and forever, is about the law of love. It is that simple...and that difficult, because loving God and loving neighbor means putting them first. It means sacrificing for those around us.⁶ And our job, our mission, if we choose to accept it, is to do just that: to love God with all we have and are and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Unless we back up what we say by what we do, we are just as empty as the Pharisees were in Jesus day. We are nothing more than what the apostle Paul says to the Corinthians: a 'noisy gong' or a 'clanging cymbal' (First Corinthians 13:5).

At some point, as we have been sharing with our young people in Confirmation, we must be 'doers of the word' (James 1:22). The Word must become flesh (John 1:1-4) – hitting the pavement, taking to the streets, caring for the lonely, helping others, sending cards, and, yes, even tweeting or emailing words of kindness. It all must come back to the center!

Let me ask you, what is your center? Your mission? Your calling?

Let me ask us as a congregation, what is our center? How would we answer that? What would you tweet? What would you post?

Jane Hughey mentioned how the early Methodists probably met outside when they gathered – in small groups, when they sang, when they prayed, when they served – whenever they could and wherever they were. Our Confirmation Class, for the most part, met outside this year, under the tree by the ball court. We met in a circle, and we shared.

But we kept coming back to the center, just as we learned Charles and John Wesley did – coming back to living what they called a holy life, of a life of love,

⁵ David J. Lose, 'Homiletical Perspective: Matthew 22:34-40' in *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew – Volume 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2013), 203-205.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 203-205.

lived out as love of God and love of neighbor. It was not fancy, but it was real. It was active; it was devout; and it was methodical. It was not something they just talked about; it was something they actually did!

Just as Jesus teaches!

To love the Lord our God with our all heart, and with our all soul, and with all our minds, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Everything hangs on that! Every tweet. Every action!

All that we say and do...

To make a kingdom-difference!

To be a real Christian!

Amen!