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Leaving a Legacy
Matthew 22: 34-40

³⁴ *When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together,* ³⁵ *and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.*

³⁶ *“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the **greatest?**”* ³⁷ *He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”* ³⁸ *This is the greatest and first commandment.* ³⁹ *And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’* ⁴⁰ *On these two commandments **hang all the law and the prophets.**”*

Don't you wish you could ***predict the future, right about now?***

With all the craziness, with so much uncertainty—

We've got a pandemic with numbers rising all around us,

the election is just days away,

And somehow we're approaching holidays too,

Holidays without some of our dearest family, and friends.

We have no idea what holidays will even look like during COVID.

If we're honest ***we want to know*** what's around the corner.

Most people would prefer a plan, or at least ***a sneak peek!***

And most of us want to see what happens in our corner of the world,

We want to see the ***fruits of our labor, the outcome of our efforts.***

Kind of like when your ***kids become old enough*** to have kids of their own, and suddenly they 'understand' what you were trying to do!

Kind of like when you ***give decades to the same company,***

and you finally get that promotion.

Which is why the story of ***Moses NOT entering the Promised Land*** in Deuteronomy just doesn't seem fair.

Moses is the one whom God called in a burning bush ***to go rescue*** the Hebrew people from Pharaoh and slavery in Egypt!

Moses is the one who led them out, through the **Red Sea**, and all through the **wilderness—for 40 years—** on their way to God's promised land!

He **spent his life working on behalf of God's people**, and this is how God repays him?

After waiting for all those years, you know that at least part of him wanted to see **the fruit of his labor, the outcome** of his blood, sweat, and tears!

Instead God told Moses to hand the mantle of leadership **over to Joshua**, who would lead the people into the land of Canaan! Moses did get to lay eyes on that land, but he wouldn't get to settle there. Surely there was some **deep disappointment**, don't you think?

This week of my Bible study friends suggested that **maybe Moses was TIRED**, and happy to pass off the leadership! Maybe.

The Bible just says that Moses came to the edge of the land, and there he died, having lived a very long life, and done some amazing things.

The truth is, although he didn't get to the Promised Land, He did lead them through the **development of their faith and identity** as the people of God!

This was the man who met with God on Mt. Sinai, Who received the **10 commandments**.

His life and faithfulness helped **shaped the nation of Israel**, and his **legacy lives on, still today!**

The **first five books of our Old Testament** are known in Judaism as the **Torah, or the Pentateuch**. These first five books of the Hebrew Bible contain the law of God, as given to Moses. It is the **central most important document** for Judaism, and central to our faith as Christians.

Moses' legacy lives on, **beyond anything he could have ever imagined**. It may have been a disappointment to not see the Promised Land,

But his ***faithfulness became a model for all generations*** to come.
 What he did endures today!
 His love of God, his love of people, changed the course of history,
 and set the stage for who we are in the church!

So that's something I want to think about today—***leaving a legacy***.
 We know what Moses' legacy was—***what will ours be?***

What do you want your legacy to be?

When you leave this world, what do you want people to remember about you?
 It might sound cliché, but I think it's an important exercise of faith,
 Especially in our current context.

We should all be thinking about who we are, and what we are living for, right?
Life is short, sometimes very short,
 and God asks us to live faithfully in each moment, and each day.
So why not ask—how can I leave a legacy?

Because we are Christians, we are also called to ask—
how can I leave a legacy of faith?

For Moses, his legacy was his faith in God, his trust, his obedience,
 And even his failures.

During that wilderness time, at a place called Meribah,
 the people complained about not having water.
 And Moses lost his temper, he cried out to God,
 And then he didn't follow God's command exactly.
 He was told to speak to a rock, and instead he struck it with his staff, twice.
 When he did, the water flowed for the people, but God said "*Because you did not
 trust me enough^[a] to show me as holy^[r] before^[s] the Israelites, therefore you will
 not bring this community into the land I have given them.* (Numbers 20:12)
 But you know what? Moses didn't throw a fit, and he didn't give up.
 He just kept leading those often cranky crowds through the wilderness!

Moses wasn't perfect, but God used him in a mighty way,
 just as God uses imperfect people everywhere,
 to accomplish divine purposes on earth.

And his life left ***an incredible legacy for all generations*** to come, who would tell his story, as a model for our faith!

We are entering our ***annual stewardship season***.

And you know that we talk here about giving and generosity all throughout the year, but in the fall we traditionally make pledges and promises about the coming year, kind of like new year's resolutions.

This year on ***November 8th*** we'll have the opportunity to bring pledge cards to worship, or send them to the church, offering our gifts in 2021.

But stewardship is really about ***taking care of EVERYTHING God has given us***. It's about realizing it's ***all a gift***, and we've been ***entrusted*** with it. And it's not just about money—it's about ***Time, Talent, AND Treasure***.

It's also about leaving a legacy.

Because ideally what we do with our Time, Talent, and Treasure will have a ***lasting impact*** on our lives, and the lives of those around us.

That's where this ***Great Commandment*** passage comes in. Really, what Jesus is telling them is ***nothing novel or new***. He is sharing ***two laws*** that every Jew would know.

The first command— "***Love^[at] the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.***"^[au] 38

Was not new.

It was from the ***Shema***, from ***Deuteronomy 6:5***,

a prayer that every Jew would know and recite daily:

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!^[a] 5 You must love^[h] the Lord your God with your whole mind,^[i] your whole being,^[i] and all your strength.^[k]

The second command—to ***'Love your neighbor as yourself.***'^[aw] 40

Was also not new.

It came from ***Leviticus 19:18***, which says:

You must not take vengeance or bear a grudge against^[ad] any of your people,^[ae] but you must love your neighbor as yourself.^[af] I am the Lord.

What was new was the ***combination of the two.***

And what Jesus says next:

on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Now, it would have ***not been unusual for a Rabbi*** at the time to ponder greater or lesser commandments, or a summary of the law.

And it was not new to think of some laws as having more to do with love of God, and some more about love of neighbor,

kind of like the first four of the 10 commandments have more to do with loving God than the last six ones, which are focused more on neighbor.

But Jesus' combination of the Shema and the Levitical law, and such a powerful statement about their purpose, was amazing and noteworthy.

To those Pharisees who knew all 613 Jewish laws, all 10 commandments, all the Books of Moses and beyond, Jesus was saying it ***all boils down to two central commands:***

Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself.

And the basis of both these commandments is just one thing: ***LOVE.***

There's a contemporary Christian song popular right now about this, By Danny Gokey, called *Love God Love People.*

He sings about how he often tries to make faith complicated, when really it all boils down to love.

Our own church's mission statement is these two commands:

Loving God, and Loving Neighbor.

And we emphasize that neighbor is ***anyone on the planet!***

Not just people we like or naturally love!

And you know what?

When you think about loving God and neighbor—that's ***NOT about an end goal.***

We don't wake up one day and say,

Well, I did it!

I've loved God, I've loved my neighbor as myself.

Now I can cross that off my list! No way!

Loving God and neighbor are not goalposts,
 They are **not outcomes**.
They are the PROCESS.
 They are the way we are to live, day after day.

So if we are always concerned with getting across a finish line,
 And getting to the ‘promised land’,
 We might miss the joy and wonder of our faith journey.
 We might **miss the traveling**,
 that reveals God’s goodness, faithfulness, and provision.

Part of **leaving a legacy, like Moses**, like all our ancestors of the faith,
 Is living **each and every moment faithfully**—
 loving God and neighbor, day after day.
 With our time, our talent, and our treasure.

I think that more often than not,
 we make choices to do what is right,
 and we **don’t get to see the outcome**.
We plant seeds, and we don’t get to see the trees that bud years later.
 We say and do little things today,
 and don’t know what impact they have down the line.
 That’s tough, but that’s us, leaving the growth and the results to God.
 We are not God.

I was listening to a podcast called **Everything Happens**,
 with Professor Kate Bowler and the Rev. Will Willimon of Duke University,
 and Will told a story about a really annoying kid in his church,
 and how later he met up with the grown man.
 This man told Willimon how much his life had been changed by his ministry.
 So, thinking it would have been a great sermon, or some big mission experience,
 Willimon asked, **what was it about my ministry that changed you?**
 And the guy said it was how you did communion.
 You said my **NAME** as you gave it to me.
 I don’t think anyone else even knew my name.

Everything Happens Podcast by Kate Bowler, *Will Willimon, Your Work is a Calling*, Sept 22, 2020.

We **never know** how what we say or do might **change a life**.
 We never know which act of love will **make a difference**.
 That's why we just keep on loving.

You know, **Phil Lutz** didn't know that his plans for **a Blessing Box** would come to fruition during a pandemic, when Owassoans were out of work, and low on food! He just drew it up, proposed it to the Session, and left it all to God. And now look at what that Box is doing after his death—It's being used over 100 times a week!
 Talk about **a LEGACY OF LOVE!**

This is why we are called to love God and neighbor—day after day.
 It's why we are called to give generously, day after day.
 Using our time, our talent, and our treasure,
 Because when we do that—by the grace of God, **it lasts. It ENDURES.**

We are called to a **PROCESS of love, and generosity**,
 not a final product.
 Which is hard, and frustrating at times, but it's part of following Jesus Christ.

And it's a **GOOD part of it!**
 Just imagine **how annoying we could be** if we knew what would change lives!

Instead, we are called **live like Moses**, wandering through the wilderness,
 Loving God, loving our neighbors,
And trusting the future to God.
 That's what it means to leave **a true legacy**.

Friends, hear the **Good News of the Gospel** today:
Leave a legacy.
 A legacy of **loving God, and neighbor**—every neighbor.
 With your **time, your talent, and your treasure**---TODAY.
 Because you never know what God will do with it down the line.
 For the gifts we have received, and the opportunity we have to love and give,
 let us all say, Amen.