
Sunday 25th October – The last Sunday after Trinity

Readings: Deuteronomy 34:1-12 & Matthew 22:23-46

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

The death of Moses

Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, opposite Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land – from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. Then the Lord said to him, ‘This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, “I will give it to your descendants.” I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.’

And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over.

Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses.

Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt – to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

Matthew 22:23-46

Marriage at the resurrection

That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and

third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?’

Jesus replied, ‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead – have you not read what God said to you, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.’

When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

The greatest commandment

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’

Jesus replied: “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. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’

Whose son is the Messiah?

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ‘What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?’

‘The son of David,’ they replied.

He said to them, ‘How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him “Lord”? For he says,

“The Lord said to my Lord:

‘Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.’”

If then David calls him “Lord”, how can he be his son?’ No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Reflection

‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ If you’re like me then you’ve heard that sentence over and over and always equated it with rules around not being selfish, putting others above ourselves, thinking of the needs of others before we get our own way. I think we often read it as ‘Love others more.’ And I don’t think that’s what Jesus means.

I think perhaps we've been looking at it back to front. I wonder whether the starting point is that Jesus is commanding us to love **ourselves** deeply. That the command isn't to love ourselves less and push down our needs and desires so that we are showing more love to others. But instead it's saying, "Start with loving yourself and **then** love others."

The command on an airplane safety announcement is for parents to put their own oxygen mask on before helping their child with this. This might feel counter-intuitive but it isn't selfish, it's sensible. If the parent isn't getting the oxygen that they need then they can't help their child to breathe properly.

And so it is with us. If we're exhausted and burnt out and trying to put others first all the time then we'll become resentful and we won't love them properly. If we're constantly frustrated with ourselves then we won't act with grace towards others. If we're never giving ourselves the rest and time out that we need then we won't be able to show love through acts of service.

Jesus loves us deeply and he's called us to love and serve other people. But he also knows that we can't do this if we're not getting what we need. We need to remember that there is a big difference between selfishness and self-care. Self-care is when we show love to ourselves. It's when we say no to things because we just can't take on any more. When we prioritise time to eat well, sleep properly, exercise, and do the things we enjoy. It's when we have a balance between work, home, church, volunteering and leisure. It's when we love ourselves. And when we're doing that we'll be refreshed and revived and loving others will come naturally.

So yes, love others. But start at the end of the command. Love yourself. And then love others in the same way.

Kerry Thomas