

## Love and Duty

by Judy Gatewood-Keim

|What motivates you to respond to the greatest commandment? I have always responded to the difficult, the epic, the call to something bigger than myself.

Today's scripture, referred to as the greatest commandment, asks

*What is the highest value of our culture? How does that single value arrange other values?*

When we ignore the rhetoric and simply look at someone's lifestyle (ourselves or others), we'll soon learn the answer to the question: what's most important?

The question asks more than values.

Much of my identity and values were, and if I am honest still are, wrapped up in a soldier mentality. In the military the phrase "mission first" was very common. All our training was to accomplish the mission. In the Army's quest to create good soldiers they established the US Army values that I came to embody.

The idea was if a soldier practiced these Army values all the time then under times of stress it was already who they were.

My call to the mission of living out the greatest commandments was born out of training. Training by my parents, training by ministers, training by others, training by the Holy Spirit. Even, rubbing shoulders with fellow soldiers, in a profession that by nature involves violence, was where learning to love others grew. As Medal of Honor recipient, then Pvt. Davis stated what motivated him to help his fellow soldiers who were under fire was not courage, as most people perceive courage, but rather what he perceived as love.

God also has a set of values to guide us summed up by the greatest commandment. This commandment reflects our part of the covenant we have with God, it reflects duty and love. God, who created this covenant, has always been holding up their part. God is devoted to us, loving us with God's whole self.

How are we, as individuals, and as a fellowship of followers, training to become more and more devoted to God?

Jesus' answer to the scribe points toward a life orientation. It helps to answer the greater question: what is the purpose of life? The Westminster shorter catechism states; What is the chief end of people? Answer, To glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

In a relationship with God, we can ask the same question: what's most important? How does that question affect various aspects of your life? What one principle or character trait tells others we are followers of Christ?

A scribe asked Jesus that question. This gospel narrative was one of the few times Jesus and the Pharisees' would agree. They looked at the Torah through the same lens, unlike the Sadducees or the Herodians who had different priorities. Jesus and his opponents, the Pharisees, used the principle of love, or fidelity, as a yardstick to measure religious practice.

### Literal Translation

28 After he had heard them disputing, having seen that HE answered them well, one of the scribes, having approached (HIM), asked HIM, "What sort of commandment is first of all?" 29 JESUS answered, "First is: 'Hear Israel, the Lord (is) our God; the Lord is one. 30 You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul,' all your mind, 'and all your strength.'"

"What sort of commandment is first of all?" The word "first" meant more than the "first in order" or the "most important." The word "first" ("protos" in Greek) also meant "guiding principle." The "first" commandment would provide the key that would unlock the religious philosophy of Jesus, how he envisioned the relationship of people with God.

12:29 "Hear Israel, the Lord (is)our God; the Lord is one." This phrase, taken from Deuteronomy 6:4, is known as the Shema (from the imperative "hear!", a confession of faith in Hebrew). This phrase and the command to love God together form THE defining phrase for the Jew. This phrase signifies a Jew as much as the Sign of the Cross signifies the Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Christian.

The phrase itself could be translated in two ways. First, the phrase could be translated in the narrow sense of Jewish allegiance to a particular God: YHWH. The word "Lord" replaced YHWH in Hebrew, out of deference to the Second Commandment. In this sense, the phrase could be translated: "Hear, Israel! YHWH is our only God." In the time of the Old Testament kings, Israelites did not question the existence of other gods from other nations. But, their God was the only one that mattered. No doubt, this was the original sense of the phrase, when Israelites lived among many polytheistic peoples.

However, by the time Jesus preached, the phrase had a much broader interpretation. In the first century AD, Judaism was strictly monotheistic. No other gods existed but YHWH. In this sense, the phrase could be translated "Hear Israel! YHWH is our God. YHWH is the only (God)." This translation reflects the broader interpretation, more than that of simple national allegiance. (See 12:32).

12:30 "'all your heart, . . . ' all your mind . . . " The phrase "all your mind" was an addition Jesus made to Deuteronomy 6:5. Since ancients believed the heart was the center of thoughts and emotions, the second phrase "all your mind" was redundant. Possibly this "doublet" reflected Jesus' emphasis on the interior intent; what came from the heart was more important than strict adherence to the Torah.

The scribe asked Jesus a question about importance in the Law. And Jesus gave a straightforward answer. Obviously, an answer about the Law should come from the Law. So Jesus quoted Scripture.

The question of importance was one of the guiding principles. Through this one command, it was possible to create a hierarchy with the other commands, give direction to their enforcement, and a symbol that encompassed the meaning of Judaism, or for us in our time, a fellowship of believers.

Even in the time of Jesus, rabbis realized that some commands in the Torah carried more weight than others. After all, gleaning wheat germ on the Sabbath was not as important as a prohibition against adultery. And, the Ten Commandments themselves were written in order of importance.

I always understood my duty was to love what God loved and commanded. Knowing God loves you with the greatest love is foundational to holding up our part of the greatest command covenant. Knowing means knowing with your heart, soul, mind and strength.

Also came the question of social expression. How do these commands proclaim YHWH among the nations, as well as unite the community of believers? What command could the faithful use to show they were Jews? Or for us a Fellowship of Followers?

Jesus answered the first part of that question with the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Love God with all your being. Love in this sense was not an inner emotion or psychological state alone. In the time and culture of Jesus, love meant allegiance. As God made a covenant with his people (a formal allegiance), God demanded a

response. A commitment and a faithful life to that covenant was the only answer. Notice that the command was pointed at the nation and the individual. God wanted faithful individuals to form a faithful community. The individual was to take ownership of her or his response and take responsibility for the type of community he or she lived in. Taking both types of ownership was implicit in the command: "Love God."

I perceive my mission within the fellowship of believers as one who never gives up on trying to do what is right, trying to make the world a little bit better by my actions, no matter where I find myself at the time. No human can do anything with ALL their heart, mind and soul. What we can do is our best; to let iron sharpen iron. But, without love it is meaningless.

For followers of Jesus love is supposed to be a verb. It is something we do as often as we can, regardless of how we feel. Now, with my strong sense of duty, I had to learn that there are times to accept grace because of my human limitations. There will be times I am like Elijah and collapse by the broom tree and need sleep and be helped and nourished by God and others. But, that is a whole different message.

I was disappointed that the hymn "The Canticle of the Turning" is not in either of our hymnals. It is one of my favorites. It is based on Mary's Magnificat. Verse #4 expresses my spiritual word for this year. That word is steady.

(song words slide)

Though the nations rage from age to age,  
 we remember who holds us fast:  
 God's mercy must deliver us  
 from the conqueror's crushing grasp.  
 This saving word that our forbears heard  
 is the promise that holds us bound,  
 'Til the spear and rod be crushed by God,  
 who is turning the world around.

Unless we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength how will we remember who holds us fast, how will our hearts sing, how will we be a part of a world about to turn?

I want to be like Peter when Jesus asked his followers, “do you want to leave too?” and Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life”. I want to love Jesus back like Jesus loves me. I want to stay on the journey.

I stated you would be introduced to songs, words, images that give you some insight into what has and what can motivate me. I appreciate the religious themes and allegory in “The Lord of the Rings”. One movie scene I particularly identify with, or want to identify with, is titled “worth fighting for” that occurs when Sam and Frodo’s are on the long dangerous road to Mordor to destroy the evil ring of Soran.

(Sam’s speech slide) (or Worth Fighting For scene)

After a battle with the Black Riders, Frodo and Sam are leaning against a wall, exhausted and Frodo appears to be questioning if they can make it all the way to Mordor

Frodo : I can't do this, Sam.

Sam : I know.

It's all wrong

By rights we shouldn't even be here.

But we are.

It's like in the great stories Mr. Frodo.

The ones that really mattered.

Full of darkness and danger they were,  
and sometimes you didn't want to know the end.

Because how could the end be happy.

How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad happened.

But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow.

Even darkness must pass.

A new day will come.

And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer.

Those were the stories that stayed with you.

That meant something.

Even if you were too small to understand why.

But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand.

I know now.

Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back only they didn't.

Because they were holding on to something.

Frodo : What are we holding on to, Sam?

Sam : That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo. And it's worth fighting for.

(Jesus slide)

When we hold on to and dearly love God, and each other, there will be some good in this world.

It doesn't matter who isn't with us. We have each other's back because we know we are following a leader who has our back. When we love God we can, and will, love each other. These two commands are the guiding principle of life and living.

Loving is the mission that is always before us. A mission we can accomplish in infinite ways because we have a guide that is worthy of our duty and our love.

Take away – boldly walk in God's love, and the fellowship of the love of others, following in the way of Jesus