

March 22, 2020

## Mark 12:28-44

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

**The Book of Mark** is most likely the first of the four gospel books to be written, sometime in the late 60s CE. In this season of Lent we move to the second half of the gospel which focuses around the movement of Jesus towards his confrontation with the powers at Jerusalem. Today's selection follows and continues a section of conflict between Jesus and his political opponents which began at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (the story of Palm Sunday) in Mark 11. Since his arrival in Jerusalem, (the political, social and religious capital of the Jewish people) Jesus has been butting heads with the leaders.

"Then Jesus and his disciples came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out *those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple*, and he overturned the tables of the *money changers* and the seats of *those who sold doves*;" Mark 11:15

"And when the *chief priests and the scribes* heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching." Mark 11: 18

Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, *the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders* came to Jesus and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority?" Mark 11:27-28

"Then they sent to him *some Pharisees and some Herodians* to trap him in what he said." Mark 12:13

"*Some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection*, came to him and asked him a question," Mark 12:18

Our section today is the final and climactic confrontation between Jesus and those who oppose him. But curiously it's ambiguous. Is this an attack from an enemy or the acknowledgment of wisdom from a potential follower?

"*One of the scribes* came near and heard [Jesus and his opponents] disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he asked Jesus,..." Mark 12:28

"WHICH COMMANDMENT IS THE FIRST OF ALL?" :: Here the scribe asks a good question, not just to spar or test, but to learn. Jesus' response is unique for he creatively combines Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18 to equate loving God with loving your neighbor and vice versa.

"<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. <sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>28</sup>One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "WHICH COMMANDMENT IS THE FIRST OF ALL?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; <sup>30</sup> you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' <sup>31</sup> The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." <sup>32</sup> Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; <sup>33</sup> and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." <sup>34</sup> When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

<sup>35</sup> While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, "How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? <sup>36</sup> David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared,

'The Lord said to my Lord,  
"Sit at my right hand,  
until I put your enemies  
under your feet.'"

<sup>37</sup> David himself calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?" And the large crowd was listening to him with delight.

<sup>38</sup> As Jesus taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, <sup>39</sup> and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! <sup>40</sup> They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

<sup>41</sup> **He sat down opposite the treasury**, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. <sup>42</sup> A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. <sup>43</sup> Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. <sup>44</sup> For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

#### QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What part of today's story grabs you?**
- **Imagine yourself as one of the scribes, or pharisees in these confrontations. How would you hear Jesus?**
- **Imagine yourself as a member in the crowd observing and listening to all of these encounters between Jesus and the religious/political leaders. How would you feel?**
- **Jesus rejects the established center of worship – the Temple – saying that worshipping God is done by loving our neighbor in all that we do. How is that challenging for you? Why then do we still need to go to church? How is loving our neighbor as we love God (and are loved by God) hard to do in this season of COVID-19? How do you feel like you need (or don't need) church in particular in this season of COVID-19? How does it all fit together for you?**
- **What invitation to walk, act, speak, or relate to others do you hear in the text today?**

"<sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." Leviticus 19:18

It is recorded that the great Rabbi Hillel said something similar. He was born according to tradition in Babylon c. 110 BCE, died 10 CE in Jerusalem) was a Jewish religious leader, sage and scholar associated with the development of the Mishnah and the Talmud and the founder of the House of Hillel school of tannaim.

He is popularly known as the author of two sayings: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And being for myself, what am 'I'? And if not now, when?" and the expression of the ethic of reciprocity, or "Golden Rule": "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn." – Wikipedia.

So while similar, it's not the same teaching which then moves Jesus to reject and condemn the political power and religious worldview symbolized and lived out in the Institution of the Temple.

**"How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? ::** Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22, 23 in his response (which is confusing for us with our historical distance) to what they've been discussing (remember he's been sparring with the scribes since 11:15) asserts the the Messiah is not a son (descendant) of David. For Jesus then God's leader is chosen not by blood by by commitment. It's not about maintaining the patriarchy but affirming a God-given ideology/theology. For Jesus, the Messiah is not coming to rehabilitate the former imperial power of the Jews known under King David.

**He sat down opposite the treasury ::** "In the gospel "Mark unsparingly caricatures the scribe as one who at every stage of social life wishes to be endowed with special privilege and status." (Ched Myers. *Binding the Strong Man.*) Jesus accuses the Scribes, who also served as judges, being the political representatives among the Jewish people, of demanding financial kick-backs and abusing their positions to profit off the backs of the most vulnerable in society (widows). Jesus then sits across from the Temple, in a position of judgement (as he will do when he prophesies the destruction of the Temple in Mark 13:3) and talks of the gift of the widow. We historically have heard the story as a commendation of the women's faithful generosity even in her poverty. But could Jesus actually be condemning the Temple edifice that goes so far as to demand and take the little that the poorest of the poor possess?