

Sermon Notes: The Last Week

Lent 2024, Week #3

Introduction

We continue our Lenten sermon series based on the book *The Last Week* by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, journeying day by day through Jesus' last week in Jerusalem. This week we move to Tuesday and an expanse of texts from the middle of the 11th chapter all the way through the end of the 13th chapter. Roughly two-thirds of this section shows Jesus in conflict with the religious leaders in the temple, where Jesus is continually challenged with questions intended to entrap and discredit him in a public setting.

Illustration Video

<https://youtu.be/AjGIJPE8B8I?si=Z1O8Oy86H4OgNIR3>

A clip from the 2007 film *Freedom Writers*, where the woman who hid Anne Frank during the holocaust, Miep Gies (Pat Carroll), comes to speak to Ms. Gruwell's (Hilary Swank) class.

Video Discussion Questions

1. High School students from a gang-infested community in Long Beach, CA have been studying the writings of Anne Frank, and then are visited by [Miep Gies](#) who hid the Frank family and other Jews from Nazi soldiers. This clip begins with Gies describing an encounter with soldiers on the day that the Frank family was arrested. Who has the authority in this story? Where does their authority come from?
2. When the student stands and calls Gies his hero, she immediately says she's not a hero. Why do you think she says this? Do you think Gies is a hero? Why or why not?
3. Gies explains that, "even an ordinary secretary or a housewife or a teenager can, within their own small ways, turn on a small light in a dark room." Do you agree? Does this idea line up with your faith in some way? If so, in what way? How do you think you can turn on a small light in a dark room?
4. After saying she's not a hero, Gies says that the students themselves are the heroes, and indeed that they are heroes every day. Why do you think she says this? Do you agree with her? How do you think these students—with all they endure in their homes and communities—feel about being called heroes? Does it make a difference who calls them heroes? Why or why not?

Mark 12:28-34 (CEB)

²⁸One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"

²⁹Jesus replied, "The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, ³⁰and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. ³¹The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these."

³²The legal expert said to him, “Well said, Teacher. You have truthfully said that God is one and there is no other besides him. ³³And to love God with all of the heart, a full understanding, and all of one’s strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself is much more important than all kinds of entirely burned offerings and sacrifices.”

³⁴When Jesus saw that he had answered with wisdom, he said to him, “You aren’t far from God’s kingdom.” After that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. During our lives, we often hear advice or words of guidance or wisdom from those who care for us. What are some of the memorable words of wisdom you have heard? What are some of the best pieces of advice you’ve ever heard? Did/do you actually follow those words of wisdom or advice when you heard them? Why or why not?
2. What verbs stand out to you from the scripture above? (*Re-read the scripture if needed*)
3. Who was debating about what at the beginning of the passage (*reading the context, the before-after of the referenced text if that helps*)? If there is no clear answer, what do you think the rabbis and teachers of the law were debating?
4. Why do you think the scribe (or teacher of the law, depending on your translation) asked that specific question about which commandment is the greatest?
5. How does Jesus answer the scribe?
6. Why do you think Jesus uses these four words (heart, soul, mind, strength) in verse 30? How does loving God with each of these features look?
7. Which of the four do you think you do the best job (or perhaps, have the easiest time with) of showing your love for God?
8. How might it change you to love God with all four of the features equally?
9. What do you think it means to love your neighbor? Who do you consider your personal neighbors? How about neighbors of our church? Of our larger community?
10. Can you name anyone in your life who truly exemplifies how to “love God and love your neighbor?” Have you ever told them how you see them?
11. What things make it difficult to love God and your neighbor?
12. Verse 31 often gets abbreviated; we are supposed to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. What do you think it means to show love for ourselves? Are there things that make loving ourselves difficult? And if so, if we don’t love ourselves, is it even possible to show love for neighbors?

Add'l (Optional) Questions for Consideration

1. Why do you think this scribe asked Jesus this particular question? Do you think this scribe is part of the wider effort to entrap Jesus?
2. What in the scribe’s response impressed Jesus?

3. Why do you think Jesus replied to the scribe the way he did? Why is Jesus' reply both an affirmation and an invitation for the scribe?
4. What might this passage teach us about Jesus?
5. What might this passage teach us about how we are to live a good life?

Weekly Action

We often feel limited on how we can have an actual impact on the world or even in our immediate circles. Sometimes it's a physical limitation, and sometimes it is something else. Set aside time in prayer to ask God to guide you to how you—regardless of how you have felt limited—can “turn on a small light in a dark room.” Allow time and space for God to speak to you, to inspire you. Make a specific plan to follow God's inspiration. Consider who you can invite to join you!

Prayer

Gracious God, your love for us is an invitation into a new way of life. We give you thanks for those who have faithfully followed you and demonstrated the way of Christ's holy love. Empower us to be those who brightly shine the light of God's love through our words and silence, our actions, and our stillness. Amen.