



“GOOD AND GREAT”
SCRIPTURE: DEUTERONOMY 6: 1-9; MARK 12: 28-34
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
November 4, 2018, All Saints
The Rev. Dr. Marcia Mount Shoop, Pastor

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

6:1 Now this is the commandment--the statutes and the ordinances--that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy,

6:2 so that you and your children and your children's children, may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.

6:3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.

6:5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

6:6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

6:7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

6:8 Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead,

6:9 and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The Word of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

Mark 12:28-34

12:28 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?"

12:29 Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;

12:30 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.'

12:31 The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

12:32 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';

12:33 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."

12:34 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.

The Word of the LORD
Thanks be to God.

Beginning in 2001, his New York Times bestseller book was all the rage not only in corporate America, but in churches and non-profits and in any organization that aspired to be "great!" Jim Collins' book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Do Not*, became the talisman for success—and the hedgehog was its spirit animal.

Collins wrote, "Picture two animals: a fox and a hedgehog. Which are you? An ancient Greek parable distinguishes between foxes, which know many small things, and hedgehogs, which know one big thing. All good-to-great leaders, it turns out, are hedgehogs. They know how to simplify a complex world into a single, organizing idea—the kind of basic principle that unifies, organizes, and guides all decisions."¹

Collins "started with 1,435 good companies, examined their performance over 40 years, and then found the 11 companies that became great." His stated goal: "to give you a lobotomy about change."

His contention: companies that go from good to great figure out how to be great at one thing—like a hedgehog does.

The Hedgehog Concept: great companies don't need a miracle moment or a revolution. They need diligence and focus over time on the one big thing they do better than anyone else.

Deuteronomy, or “the second law,” was presented to the people of Israel before they got to the promise land. It was a comprehensive guide to being God’s people in a new land. On the plains of Moab Moses shares God’s own “Hedgehog Concept.”

The people had grown wary of kings. Kings had overpromised and under delivered. So, the people were learning to trust the law more than lawmakers, to trust God more than human beings. The people were learning how to protect themselves against the greed and abusive systems that dominated their world.

God says your descendants will be well and numerous if you remember one thing: the law—you can’t forget it—you must remember it in your hearts—God is one, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and might.

God gifts them with a clear plan for how to make love a priority in their lives over the long haul and in a new land and in a world that was hard to trust.

Fast-forward several centuries and a Jewish scribe overhears the disciples and Jesus arguing about what commandment is the greatest. The law written on the hearts of God’s people is a topic of debate and division.

The scribe comes and asks because he recognizes Jesus’ answers are good. Up until now in the Gospel of Mark the scribes were hostile questioners, not affirming of Jesus. They were suspicious of Jesus. But this scribe was appreciative. He heard the truth—the goodness in what Jesus was saying about the greatest commandment.

The scribe affirms that one can love God and neighbor, fulfill the law, without ritual observance. He agrees that loving God and neighbor and self are more important than burnt offerings. What’s in your heart is what really matters.

The goodness of the greatest commandment is common ground for Jesus and the scribe. They agree on the one big thing that God wants from the human race.

The hedgehog knows how to do one big thing—roll up into a spiny ball when threatened or afraid in order to stay alive.

The one big thing God wants from the human race isn’t to curl up in a ball to save our own lives. The one big thing God wants from the human race is for us to unfold from the fears that make us small, to stretch out from the caution that isolates us, to open ourselves up to the pain of the world.

Humans, unlike hedgehogs, are called to be the best in the world at love—and love is wide open, love is vulnerable, love is dangerous, love exposes us to pain instead of

protects us from pain. What is the hardest part for you—the hardest part of the one big thing God is asking us to do and to be?

Is it loving God with everything you've got?

Is it loving your neighbor?

Is it loving yourself?

Because if one is hard, then all three of them are hard.

Maybe the hardest part isn't the object of love, but what love itself actually is.

Valarie Kaur² a lawyer and the founder of The Revolutionary Love Project says, "Love is sweet labor. Fierce. Bloody. Imperfect. Life-giving. A choice we make over and over again."

She says, "Loving just ourselves is narcissism. Loving only our opponents is self-loathing. And loving only others is ineffective."

Jesus' Hedgehog Concept tells us the exact same thing—for love to be love it must be triple-directional all at once—love God, love neighbor, and love self.

For Collins going from good to great meant a giant leap in profits—pure and simple.

Two of the 11 companies on Collins' good to great list were Fannie Mae and Wells Fargo. Just a few years after Collins' book told us the secret to success, these two companies were exposed: one tangled up in the subprime mortgage scandal and one found to have committed bank fraud. So their greatness doesn't look so good anymore.

A 2018 look back at Collins' good to great formula gives us some wisdom for our current cultural moment—***when we could use some more goodness in our greatness.*** We need greatness that does not leave goodness behind in the pursuit of profits and success.

Our call is to be good ***and*** great—both goodness and greatness are a function of the quality of our relationships—with God, with each other, and with ourselves.

The hedgehog concept starts with the question of what you are passionate about, and then asks what can you be the best in the world at, and then asks what best "drives your resource engine."³

The answer to all of these questions for Christians today has got to be love. The kind of love that labors because its life depends on it—labors for God, labors for the stranger, and for the self—for the stranger within the self, for the self within the stranger. For God made the stranger and the self in God’s own image.

It is the kind of love that knows how to be good **and** great—passionate about love, committed to being the best in the world at loving, and clear on who our resource engine is—the Incarnate God—broken and beautiful, suffering and steadfast, mighty and mysterious—and if we have to sum this God up in one word, well, the greatest of these is love.

And this Table is where we taste and see that God’s love is good, that God’s love is great—and where we are fed and sustained for this laboring love: this “fierce, bloody, imperfect,” and chosen way of life—with the great cloud of witnesses—strangers, friends, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, lovers, partners, leaders, teachers, all those who surround us, and who helped to teach us of the power of love to heal broken hearts and broken relationships and broken promises. Love heals.

This is Jesus’ love feast—made for re-remembering—for putting back together the broken, the brutalized, the betrayed. This Table is built on truth we can trust—that being well is God’s work in community, not in isolation. This is a Table seasoned by the love that connects us to God, to each other, and to ourselves.

This Table teaches us not to be afraid of the cost of love, not to be afraid of grief. This Table teaches us the beautiful symmetry of love doing what it does best—not giving up. Love doesn’t quit, love doesn’t die—it knows how to hold on, it knows how to let go, it knows how to grow things in hard places and soft places, it knows how to work in the shadows, and it knows how make the impossible within our reach.

It is here that we learn to make life in unfamiliar places, to find connection in unlikely faces, and to trust that Christ makes us brave enough to make the hardest thing into the good and great thing—you see love, far from a guarantee for success, is risky business after all.

Thanks be to God.

¹ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Do Not*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2001). https://www.jimcollins.com/article_topics/articles/good-to-great.html

² <http://www.revolutionarylove.net/ted/>

³ <https://www.jimcollins.com/concepts/the-hedgehog-concept.html>