



**“LOVE SHIFT”**  
**SCRIPTURE: MARK 12: 28-34**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**Sunday, October 31, 2021**  
The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

**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.**

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It's a love triangle--this triad that Jesus spells out to the religious person drawn to disputes.

You have to remember what led up to this question in the Gospel of Mark-- Jesus flexing his muscles for settling an argument. Parable, rhetoric, deductive reasoning, emotion, surprise, absurdity.

This is the same Jesus who the Gospel of Mark has telling people to keep things a secret, to tell no one. The same Jesus who is getting more and more credibility among those who had long been settling their disputes among each other with technicalities, legalities, shame, and blame.

Think of that scribe as a devoutly religious person--any kind of religion will do. You know, the religious person who thinks they have all the answers, who walks around scrutinizing people for the ways they aren't "getting it right."

Maybe you know a religious person like that. Maybe you are a religious person like that.

That religious person, who had all the "gotcha" resources you can imagine at their disposal, that religious person was drawn in by how Jesus comported himself in disputes. That religious person saw that Jesus inhabited these contested spaces well. And that religious person wanted to come closer to this Jesus.

This Children's Sabbath, this Reformation Sunday, this weekend in Asheville/Buncombe County when historic markers were erected for three human beings who were lynched in this community: Bob Brackett, Hezekiah Rankin and John Humphries, this day when we are once again gathered in God's name proclaiming that God's love should define everything we do and everything we are together, I can't imagine a more fitting scripture than the one the lectionary offers us.

The one with the love triangle of all love triangles--the greatest commandment, the three in one, a trinity of connections that define and amplify and require each other.

"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. [And,] you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

Love triangles are usually hurtful--they are usually about betrayal and lies, deceit and dehumanization. They are often about broken promises and broken trust.

That's what makes this the love triangle to end all love triangles. It is not about betrayal, deceit, broken trust, or broken promises.

It is about interdependence and mutual liberation, it is about vulnerability met with trustworthy support, it is about the way love shifts when there is pain, when there is harm.

It's about the way love feeds and flows through healthy connection and being true to who we were made to be.

We were made for love.

Love shifts when its beloved tells it something hurts. Love shifts when its beloved says it needs something different to feel fully alive. Love shifts when its beloved is languishing.

Jesus tells those drawn into the disputes to get clear on the foundation of the sacred purpose of human life. It is love--not winning arguments. It is relationships, not being right--as Rev. Tami Forte Logan reminds us again and again.

All three parts of this love triangle require the other two to have integrity. You can't say you love God with all you've got when you hate yourself with a passion. You can't say you know how to fully love yourself and then struggle to love your neighbor. These three loves require each other--they are nothing without each other.

And what better way to check in around how we are doing with love of God, self, and neighbor than to consider how the children of our human family are faring these days.

I invited many of those in the GCPC community who work with children to share one thing they see challenging children in Asheville/Buncombe County and one thing that gives them hope.

Listen closely for where God is calling you to make a love shift.

## Play video (11 minutes)

Our kids are telling us something needs to shift. If we were doing well by the greatest commandment, Asheville would not have the worst achievement gap in the entire state of North Carolina and the 5th worst achievement gap in the whole country.

If we were doing well with the whole love yourself thing then we wouldn't solve problems by criminalizing the behavior that children display when they are stressed out, traumatized, and looking for love and support.

If we were doing well with the whole love your neighbor thing then we wouldn't be talking about how hard it is to provide support for anyone who has found the courage to say they need support.

For love to be love, it shifts, it responds.

For this love shift to take hold in you, God can't be some far away judge scrutinizing your every move, moving the chess piece of your life back and forth between punishment and blessing. For this love shift to find life in you and me, we have to believe God loves us fiercely and that God is right here with us every step of the way.

Let that land in your body. Can you believe it? Can you let yourself believe that you--yes you are loved fiercely by the same creator who dreamed up solar systems and ecosystems and particle physics and the vast ocean teeming with life we cannot number? That's the God who is very present, right here, right now.

Because if you and I, if all us human beings really believed that about ourselves, I believe the world would be a very different place than it is right now. So much of the pain we inflict on each other, is the pain we feel in our own bodies, the self-loathing, the self-doubt, the feelings of inadequacy, the feelings of hurt and resentment and anger, the feeling of a lack of love in our lives.

If we actually believed love is pouring into our bodies every moment of every day, would we not feel more free to pour love into the lives of every sibling in our great big human family. Would we not feel more free to take care of

ourselves and celebrate each and every child--including the child we carry around within ourselves.

That's Jesus' whole point in distilling down the one thing that brings us closer to God's kingdom--until we fully embrace that being a child of God is not a sweet turn of phrase, but a statement of fact that we can stake our lives on, until we really, deep down in our bones know ourselves to be loved so completely--until then, we will continue to struggle with how to love the children entrusted to us in this community, in this world.

And until we can love our youngest neighbors who are looking to us to learn what love looks like on this planet, until then, we really can't say we are loving God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength.

Our ancestors in the Reformed faith were all about shifting--that's our M.O. as Reformed Christians. We are the ones who God calls to the leading edge of change. We are the ones who are supposed to be practiced at not making idols of old ways that cause harm and that diminish our capacity to live the life we were made to live with and for each other.

This love shift is what God is calling us to step into with humility, with boldness, and with trust.

Jessica Graham, GCPC Elder and Guidance Counselor at North Buncombe High School, shared a poem on FB that feels like a good place for us to end and begin again as people shifting once again because we are learning anew that we were made for love.

"The Worst Thing" by Chelan Harkin

"The worst thing we ever did  
was put God in the sky  
out of reach  
pulling the divinity  
from the leaf,  
sifting out the holy from our bones,  
insisting God isn't bursting dazzlement  
through everything we've made  
a hard commitment to see as ordinary,

stripping the sacred from everywhere  
to put in a cloud man elsewhere,  
prying closeness from your heart.

The worst thing we ever did  
was take the dance and the song  
out of prayer  
made it sit up straight  
and cross its legs  
removed it of rejoicing  
wiped clean its hip sway,  
its questions,  
its ecstatic yowl,  
its tears.

The worst thing we ever did is pretend  
God isn't the easiest thing  
in this Universe  
available to every soul  
in every breath.

Thanks be to God.