

"Speaking Wisely"

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Let's open our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, help us to know your love for us so we can love you and love others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Several years ago, a radio station ran a contest. "Just for fun," they said, "when you wake up to the sound of FM-106, call and tell us the first words you spoke when you rolled out of bed. If you're the third caller, you'll win \$106."

It didn't take long for the contest to grow in enthusiasm. The first morning, a buoyant disc jockey said, "Caller number three, what did you say when you rolled out of bed this morning?" A groggy voice said, "Do I smell coffee burning?" Another day, a sleepy voice said, "Oh no, I'm late for work." It was a funny contest and drew a considerable audience.

One morning, the third caller said something unusual. The station phone rang. "Good morning, this is FM-106. You're on the air. What did you say when you rolled out of bed this morning?"

A voice with a Bronx accent replied, "You want to know my first words in the morning?" The bubbly DJ said, "Yes, sir! Tell us what you said."

The Bronx voice responded, "Shema, Israel ... Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." There was a moment of embarrassed silence. Then the radio announcer said, "Sorry, wrong number" and cut to a commercial.

What did you say when you rolled out of bed today? Was it a prayer?

Terry read to us a very important passage from Deuteronomy, where Moses sets out God's most important commandment to the Israelites. The

reading contains what is known as the *Shema*, the central part of the Jewish morning and evening prayers. *Shema* is a Hebrew word that literally means "Hear," which is the first word of the *Shema*: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone." The prayer continues "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."

A scribe asks Jesus, "Which commandment is the first of all?" It was a question that was a matter of constant contentious debate. The Pharisees had codified the law into 248 positive commandments and 365 prohibitions. These 613 precepts were imposed by the Pharisees on their followers and there was constant debate over which ones were the most important. Jesus responds to the scribe with the *Shema*. Then he says, "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself,'" quoting a passage from Leviticus. Love God, love others. The scribe repeats Jesus' reply in his own words and Jesus complements him for speaking wisely. These commandments sound simple, but living them is our greatest human challenge.

Several years ago, the world was horrified at the behavior of some Chinese people in the city of Foshan, Guangdong. The internet was buzzing as the video of a little 2-year old girl was viewed over and over around the world.

Two year-old Wang Yue, known as "Little Yue Yue," wandered away from her home while her mother was quickly collecting laundry. Closed-circuit cameras captured the child wandering into a narrow, busy market street. Within a few moments of her appearance on the screen, she was struck by a white van, and knocked to the ground under the van's front wheels. The van driver pauses, but does not get out. After a moment, he pulls forward slowly, his rear wheels drive over Little Yue Yue and he drives

away. Little Yue Yue is crying, holding her head, moving her arms and legs and bleeding. At least 18 people walk past her and do not assist her, some pausing to stare before moving on. A motorcyclist rides around her and another large truck runs over her legs with both front and rear wheels. She is eventually helped by a female rubbish scavenger and sent to hospital, but she died eight days later. *China Youth Daily*, the official Chinese Communist party newspaper for youth published the results of a poll where 88% of those polled thought Little Yue Yue died because of growing indifference [in China] towards other people. If it was one of our kids, or one of us, we sure would hope that someone would help. Someone that would "love one's neighbour as oneself."

There are four different words for love that are used in Greek. *Eros* is passionate love or romantic love of a sexual nature – we get the word *erotic* from *eros*. *Storge* is natural or instinctual love like that of a parent for their child. *Philia* is strong friendship as in brotherly love – the opposite of *philia* is *phobia*. Finally there is *agapé*, which is the love originating from God for humankind and reciprocated in selfless human love for God that persists regardless of circumstances. The love that is used by Mark in expressing the greatest commandments is *agapé*. We love our neighbour even when our neighbour refuses to reciprocate because our neighbour is loved by God and has value.

Our reading from Mark comes as a bit of a surprise. A scribe overhears a religious dispute with Jesus, recognizes that Jesus' speaks wisely, asks Jesus about the greatest commandment, and is able to repeat the truth of Jesus' wise reply. Despite the negative view of the scribes that runs throughout the gospel according to Mark, this scribe approves of Jesus' teaching and acknowledges that the will of God expressed in the commandments can be fulfilled without participating in the Jewish cults of

burnt offerings and sacrifices. The commandment to love God and love your neighbour as yourself comes first.

Max Lucado, in his book, *Outlive Your Life: You Were Made to Make a Difference*, relates the story of 22 people who travelled to London on a fall morning in 2009 to thank Nicolas Winton. All were in their 70s or 80s on a journey of gratitude. They came to thank the man who had saved their lives: a stooped centenarian who met them on a train platform just as he had in 1939.

Nicolas Winton was a 29 year-old stock broker at the time. Hitler's armies were ravaging Czechoslovakia, tearing Jewish families apart and marching parents to concentration camps. Nicolas heard the plight of the children and resolved to help them. He used his vacation to travel to Prague, where he met parents who, incredibly, were willing to entrust their children's future to his care. After returning to London, Nicolas worked his regular job on the stock exchange by day and advocated for the children at night. He convinced Great Britain to permit their entry. He found foster homes and raised funds. Then he scheduled his first transport on March 14, 1939, and accomplished seven more over the next five months. His last trainload of children arrived on August 2nd, bringing the total of rescued children to 669.

On September 1st, the biggest transport was to take place, but Hitler invaded Poland, and Germany closed borders throughout Europe. None of the 250 children on that train were ever seen again.

After the war, Nicolas didn't tell anyone of his rescue efforts, not even his wife. In 1988, she found a scrapbook in their attic with all the children's photos and a complete list of names. She prodded him to tell the story and since then, adults who were rescued as children have returned to say thank you. The grateful group includes a film director, a Canadian journalist, a

news correspondent, a former minister in the British cabinet, a magazine manager, and one of the founders of the Israeli Air Force. There are some 7,000 children, grandchildren and great grandchildren who owe their existence to Nicolas Winton's bravery and love of neighbour.

The commandments to love God and love your neighbour as yourself are the heart, spirit and soul of Christianity. It's a framework for ethical thinking and attests to the intrinsic equality of all human beings that forms the foundation of justice. St. Augustine wrote wisely, "Whoever, therefore, thinks that he [or she] understands the divine Scriptures or any part of them so that it does not build the double love of God and of our neighbour does not understand it at all." Write these commandments on your heart. Jesus and the scribe were speaking wisely when they told us to love God and love our neighbour as ourself. Amen.