

Exploring Scripture for October 29, 2023
Matthew 22:34-40
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We continue with the question-and-answer section of the gospel between Jesus and the religious leaders. Last week we read his exchange with the Pharisees regarding the payment of taxes to Caesar (Matt 15-22). The next question is posed by a different group, the Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection because it wasn't explicitly addressed in the Torah. So, they posed a hypothetical problem for Jesus to solve. If a woman were married to a man and he died, she would then be married to his brother to carry on the family line. But what if that brother died, and the next one, and the next one, until all seven brothers had passed. Which brother would she be married to in the resurrection? Jesus didn't take the bait – the question was irrelevant, he replied, and instead offered this verse from Exodus 3:6 as his proof: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is God not of the dead, but of the living." (Matt 22: 32). That silenced the Sadducees, for Jesus had provided a pronouncement from God that they all held in common.

Now the Pharisees try again. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" (Matt 22:36). That was a dangerous question because there were 613 commandments to follow in the Torah. The test for Jesus is to pick one of those commandments and declare it greater than all the rest. It turns out that Jesus doesn't pick just one commandment, but two from the Torah. The first one that he quotes is from Deuteronomy: "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." (Matt 22:37, Deut 6:5) Now this verse is something every Jew knew by heart. It is from a portion of the Torah called the *shema*, and it is recited at every Shabbat service in a synagogue around the world to this day. The second part of his reply is taken from Leviticus: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18). Loving God with all of our being is only a partial answer. We must also love all of our fellow brothers and sisters with that same kind of love.

The beauty of Jesus' answer is that these two commandments, joined together as the Great Commandment, are the foundation for the living of our faith. It takes both the love of the divine and the human and puts them on the same plane. One is a total commitment of our lives to God, reflecting God's love for us back to God. The other is a commitment to love one another, reflecting God's love for us to our fellow human beings. Combining these two ways to show love provides a standard by which we measure our actions.

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) What are the ways that you show your love for God?
- 2) What are the ways you show love for your neighbor?