

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, June 28, 2020, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 10:34-42

“Number One”

How many of you have heard the word ‘Shema?’ It is not something you spread on a bagel or something like that. The “Shema” is a prayer that all good Jews knew then, and should know also today. It comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and is memorized, and placed on the doorpost of homes in a scroll, inside of a mezuzah – that is touched when entering or leaving the home. It is to be remembered as you go your way in or out. *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”* You heard a part of that this morning when I read to you what Our Lord Jesus Christ said. I want to suggest to you that the most important part of that prayer is this - *“the LORD is one”* is a description – not that He is monotheistic – but *“one”* is the place that He is to hold in our lives, our hearts, and our minds. The Christian might look at this prayer as an indication that He is one God in three persons – the Trinity, and while that is true – the most important significance of this is the place where God should be in our lives – number one!

An important question that each of us needs to ask ourselves is – where in our list of priorities is God? You may remember David Letterman had a “Top Ten List?” A dear friend of mine was his sound engineer at NBC, and he was the one who, when David would take the blue card and fling it through the window frame, my friend, Bruce Leonard, would make that crashing glass sound. You might remember that. Think of your “Top Ten List.” When we get up in the morning – do we first put on the coffee, have a little something to eat – and then maybe take some time to thank God for the new day and what is in store for us? Or is our mind racing with all of the things that we need to do that day? Where in your list does God come?

Last week I shared with you something that I have learned, that I felt the Lord put on my heart, – and that is that we do not need to slam God and overwhelm Him with our list of needs and wants – for He knows them already! Instead we should be lifting up those we are thankful for, and asking God to do His will in our life and the lives of those we care about. We can give Him our concerns and those people whom we want healing for, but again we need to let Him be God – to do His will and not ours. I want to encourage you to speak with God every morning – thanking Him and lifting up those whom we love. It is so very, very important. He should – and He must come first. It is also not such a bad idea to speak to Him throughout the day. As the Apostle Paul says, “pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

The Gospel message today is an unnerving - one in which Jesus clearly says the He must come at the top of every priority list. Here is a perfect example – He says, *“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me”* (Matthew 10:37) It would seem on the surface that Jesus was looking to drive families apart – but that is not His intention. He is simply saying that we need to set out priorities straight. What, is happening, in reality, that some families and relationships are broken apart because of non-belief, or because of social issues that have become more important than the Word of God. We have experienced that, here in this church,

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in the Anglican Church of North America, when we left our dearly beloved church because they went astray and we wanted to stay with the Word of God. I won't say any more about that – as it is still too fresh on many of our hearts. Some parents have disowned children because the children have found Jesus in their life. It is absolutely wonderful to love and care for your family – BUT – Jesus needs to come first. “*The Lord our God is ONE!*” We easily can chant at a sporting event “we're number one, we're number one!” People would look at us strangely if the chant were “Jesus is number one, Jesus is number one!” Society was not, and is not ready for that in this politically correct world.

We can see, as the story unwinds, how difficult this was even for those who knew Jesus personally and followed Him every day: He was speaking to the Apostles. Peter denied Him, Judas betrayed Him, the rest all ran away and hid when Jesus was arrested, tried, and killed. But the challenge remains, for us to be embracing everything, demanding everything, offering everything, and promising everything to Him. For His sake. This is like on the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus taught a new way of following God – priorities must be straightened. Listen to these words of Jesus as He taught, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”* (Matthew 5:3-12)

Just like those words from the Sermon on the Mount, the challenge of Jesus' sayings is matched by the remarkable promises that He makes to those who accept them and live by them. Those who deny Him before others is to ‘disown Him.’ He will ‘own’ us before His father in Heaven. Those who lose their lives will find them. Can you just imagine the remarkable chain reaction of those who serve their fellow human beings out of love for Jesus. I spoke to you about the Coffee County Food Bank – that is out of love for Jesus. Feed the poor, give to those who need – and we can come alongside them. Whatever you do for Jesus, you do, not just for Jesus, but for God (‘the one who sent Me’). Give a cup of cold water to one of Jesus' least significant followers and you are giving it to Jesus Himself. It might look like a box of macaroni and cheese – but it is everything to the person who receives it.

People have looked at this pericope – or passage of Scripture from the life of Jesus - as our Lord pitting family members against one another -but again Jesus is asking us to check our priorities. Just before today's Holy Gospel are the words from last week's Holy Gospel from Matthew 10:32-33 in which Jesus says, “*Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.*” Again, it really has to do with our priorities.

Sometimes, no let me correct that, this topic should always make people a little uneasy. That is its intention. Can you just imagine the people who heard Jesus speaking those words about family members against one another? Again, what Jesus is getting at is “what is before Him in your life?” When it comes to worshipping Him – what stands in your way of doing that first? What come before Him on a Sunday morning? What comes before giving your time, your treasure, or your talents for Him? These are very valid questions and I could go on and on – as they all make every one of us just a bit uncomfortable. The bottom line is this: Jesus needs to be first – number one – and believe me, my friends, my family – that is non-negotiable.