

Today's Gospel has two parts: The few times I read it, I struggled to understand the connection between the Pharisee's question and the one Jesus asked. Finally, I asked myself, "What is going on here?" I took a few minutes to read the whole of Matthew 22, and the last part of chapter 21. As Paul Harvey used to remind us on a daily basis, I needed to hear the "rest of the story."

I hope this will sound familiar, we've been reading this story for a few weeks. Jesus had been telling a crowd parables; both the Pharisees and the Sadducees were pretty certain Jesus was criticizing them. They determined to trap him with his own words. First, the Pharisees asked if it was lawful to pay taxes. Hopefully you all remember Jesus answer that begins, "Render unto Caesar..."

Then, the Sadducees took a turn testing him, asking Jesus about the Resurrection. "If a woman has married seven brothers successively, whose wife will she be at the Resurrection? I can almost picture Jesus, shaking his head and calling them, "Silly Sadducees," instead, kindly I think, explaining that at the Resurrection it won't matter!

So we come today's Gospel which concludes the story. The Pharisees have one more question. Jesus has an good answer; we'll get to that in a moment because that question is the meat of this whole 22nd chapter of Matthew.

First let's look at the second part of what we read today. After coming up with undeniable answers to all three questions, Jesus turns the tables on them, but once again I had to do a little research to get a clear understanding.

Jesus asks the Pharisees, "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They give him the age-old answer of their time, "He's the son of David." So Jesus poses a riddle-like question, "If the Messiah is the son of David, why does David, by the Spirit, call him Lord."

Our Gospel lesson records that when Jesus began, "The Lord said to my Lord..." he was quoting Psalm 110. In the Psalmist's Hebrew, there are two different words for Lord in that clause, each with distinct meaning. If I substituted those meanings, I got a much clearer picture. Remember David is speaking, "Yahweh (the omnipotent God) said to adonai (my master), 'Sit here at my right hand....'" So in effect, Jesus asked, "If David calls the Messiah, 'master,' how can the Messiah be David's son?"

Then Matthew's Gospel reports, not only were the Pharisees unable to answer that question, but from that day forward, they dared not ask Jesus any more questions.

Now back to the first part of today's Gospel, the third and final attempt to "entrap him in what he said." A Pharisee asks Jesus which commandment is the greatest. Many of us memorized Jesus' response while we were still in grade school. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul." Both the Pharisees and Jesus knew it well, too! It appears verbatim in Deuteronomy, chapter 6 and was part of the Shema, a prayer recited twice daily by pious Jews.

Jesus then added a second commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." That is part of the Leviticus lesson we heard this morning. Jesus concluded, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

I participated in a discussion group last summer based on a book by Walter Brueggeman who has written numerous books about putting faith into action. He boiled it down to "Love God, love neighbor." He convinced me that love of neighbor is integral part of loving God.

The New Testament speaks to this in many places. Luke's Gospel responds to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" with the story of the Good Samaritan. Early in the book of Acts, the Apostles concluded that feeding a group of Greek widows was as much a part of the church's ministry as preaching, but they were overburdened trying to do both. So they ordained Deacons to serve those needy ones. I John, asks how you can love God who you *do not* see unless you love your brother or sister who you do see? My personal favorite is James 2, "Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith."

What I find truly wondrous is that Jesus turned this whole attempt to entrap and discredit him into one of the most basic lessons of our faith: love God, love neighbor.