

**Series Title: “Glad and Generous Hearts”**

**1 November 2015: 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**ALL SAINT’S SUNDAY**

FUMC—Arlington, TX 76011

“The Good Scribe?”—Preaching Text: Mark 12:28-34

+++++

“Colleges hate geniuses, just as convents hate saints”

— (Ralph Waldo Emerson).

+++++

May we hear the lesson for the day:

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?” 29 Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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.’ 31 The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

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;’ 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.” 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 (Mark 12:28-34).

My friend Buzz Stevens, told me a memorable story. A duke and duchess owned a large country estate with many servants who maintained it in their absence. One day the duchess decided to bring the servant staff together to get an accounting of how well they had performed their duties. She called them into a room one-by-one and asked them how things were going. In the midst of a lengthy interview the duchess said to one of the older servants, “Let me see, you have been with us twenty years?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Your job is to walk the dog?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“But the dog has been dead for eighteen years?” [A long pause . . .]

“Is there anything else you would like me to do, ma’am?”

If this is where we are with our Lord and God, then we know what kind of a servant we are, don’t we? Perhaps, it is time to re-evaluate where we are with regard to our talents. How do we deal with the talents God has entrusted to us?

Good stewards are thoughtful disciples—those stewards who evaluate God’s gifts and deploy these gifts in ways that build up God’s Realm. Today’s text highlights a scribe with whom

Jesus resonates. For this reason the scribe is worthy of attention.

Usually when a scribe appears in the New Testament, it signals a clash between Jesus and part of the religious establishment. Up to this point in Mark's Gospel we readers find an assortment of occasions underlining scribes' too often negative status in Mark's story. For example, Mark suggests that the scribes do not have authority (Mark 1:22), that they question Jesus "in their hearts" (Mark 2:6), that they ask questions or make remarks that throw a damaging light on Jesus' ministry (Mark 2:16, 3:22, 7:5), and that scribes will reject Jesus in company with the elders and chief priests (Mark 8:31). The scribes were among the religious authorities who regularly argued with Jesus (Mark 9:14). Because of Jesus' spellbinding effect on the crowds whom he taught, the scribes looked for a way to stop Jesus (Mark 11:18).

Consequently, when Jesus says to the scribe in our lesson today, "You are not far from the kingdom of God," Jesus' affirmation not only ought to make us curious, but also offers us a golden occasion for reflection. Jesus' offering praise to one of the religious authorities is worth documenting—which Mark has done. The astute Bible reader and steward of the "mysteries of God" promptly detects that Jesus resonates with this individual and unnamed scribe. Mark tells us that "Jesus saw that he answered wisely." The scribe's wise answer prompts Jesus' response that this particular scribe is not far from the Kingdom of God.

The scribe responds to Jesus' claim, which boils down the Jewish law these essentials: love God and love neighbor. The scribe states Jesus' teaching, "is much more important than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Which is to say: "Although ritual may be essential, what is most indispensable is the loving of both God and neighbor." Maybe we could say that loving neighbor is loving God—and vice-versa.

In the realm of stewardship, we church folk at times put too much emphasis on pledge cards or estimates of giving once a year. Jesus' encounter with the "good scribe" reminds us of a vital truth of proper relationship to God. Perhaps our pledge cards or estimates of giving,

or in other words, our equivalent to “burnt offerings and sacrifices” can too habitually become substitutes for something deeper and more consequential than our outward devotion. Loving God and neighbor in heartfelt ways continually motivates whatever other outward manifestations our fidelity may reveal. As one of my old preacher mentors, and fine saint of the church, Jay Darnell, repeated often as his mantra: **“People can give without loving, but no one can love without giving.”**

We suffer the same temptations that first century people did. We like control. We want to control our lives and even our relationship with God. But when we see Jesus and a scribe in agreement, then we fittingly pay rapt attention. Possibly the scribe and Jesus agree with Isaiah’s question: “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord.” Isaiah provides a steward’s answer: “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:1, 16-17).