



Simple Gifts

Words to Inspire the Spirit

IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL

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The Great Commandment

By The Rev. Sam Sheridan

“One of the scribes came near and heard [Jesus disputing with the Sadducees], and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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’” Mark 12:28-30.

Each day for thousands of years, most Jewish people have prayed these words that Jesus quotes and that appear in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. This prayer is called the *Shema*, which is the Hebrew word that begins it, “Listen.”

Jesus extolls the *Shema* as the highest form of virtue. It is easy to remember. In the Gospel, this first commandment is immediately paired with *love your neighbor as yourself*, demonstrating one of the most fundamental Christian claims – that the correct and appropriate response to God’s love for us is turning outward and loving one another.

The *Shema*, the first and greatest commandment, really gets me in the spirit of Advent. Jesus, speaking in Aramaic but recorded in Greek, says “and with all your mind, and with all your strength” when Deuteronomy only says *meod* (מְאֹד *may - ode*), an adverb that really only means “very”!

Meod is very; *Meod* is muchness. *Meod* is our all, our everything, our whatever-else. The Sadducees are the Temple authority, the people most invested in God’s love being measured on a checklist of things they wanted you to do or be. Jesus, quoting the *Shema*, says that really God’s love is more like your whole being responding and becoming part of God loving yourself and other people.

The scribe asked what was most important. Jesus says giving your very, your extra, your muchness – seeking to love God in every area of your life and in the world. That’s the most Advent answer possible.

We are waiting. We are waiting in Advent for healing, for rescue, for fixes to the problems and the suffering of the world. We are waiting for God, and God has already come, and God has invited us to participate in God’s work in every part of our life.

Each Advent we await what we’ve already seen and remember that the One we await is working for more of His love reflected everywhere.

The waiting of Advent isn’t, “I’ll take a nap and maybe when I get up the world will be better.” Jesus says our part in waiting for the saving of this world is to pour our *meod*, our very, our muchness – our whole being into loving one another just as God loves us.

When we **love**, an Advent love is from the deep wellspring of our souls.

When we **forgive**, an Advent forgiveness is the very mercy of God reflected in our lives and relationships.

When we **give**, an Advent giving is our *meod* – our everything; time, talent, treasure, and attention – given so that we can participate in God’s giving to the world.

The *Shema* is in the bones of Christian witness. The Greatest Commandment is the logic behind a season of waiting for something that's already come. In Advent we await a God of self-giving love who has invited us to be that self-giving in the lives of others.

Part of the way God has promised to heal the world **is** you and I learning to love one another with our heart, our soul, our everything.