

Ser20-41 "What's the Greatest Commandment in the Gospels Got to do with Me in 2020?" Matthew 22:34-46 TUCC

Last Sunday, in our first worship service here in person and on FB live streaming, we had five new guests join the 19 of us here for in person worship for a total of 24 in person and at least 12 on FB live streaming. That's encouraging news. But alas, as I suggested last Sunday what matters most is not how we are doing church, or how or where we are worshipping, or even how many people are here, it's about how we are experiencing God working in our lives. How we are experiencing Jesus this morning.

Of the guests who joined us last Sunday, I asked one how she found us; she said, "I have watched the sign for when you would have worship here in the sanctuary again and I love the colorful sign on the side of the building"--
BE THE CHURCH: Protect the environment.; Care for the poor; Embrace diversity; Reject racism; Forgive often; Love God; Fight for the powerless; Share earthly and spiritual resources; Enjoy this life.

She said that sign describes a church that cares about the community; and I can say Trinity UCC cares about the great commandment Jesus offers this morning. *"Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.' This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' These two commands are pegs; everything in God's Law and the Prophets hangs from them."* The be the church sign and this commandment are in sync.

With the announcement of the new pastoral search committee being established I then remembered by first sermon I preached here back in April 2018. I wondered then about what sort of hopes and dreams and expectations you had for the future. Indeed, what kind of church is TUCC and what kind of church are you going to be in the future? Some of that is expressed in the newly created Identity, Mission, Vision, and Values statement of the church. That new statement or declaration says a lot about what the great commandment of Jesus has to do with us in 2020.

Let me read the new mission and vision statement: TUCC **exists to Love people where they are and encourage them to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.** Vision Statement: In ten years, TUCC will be a church that is **a vibrant and diverse community of Christians that welcomes and seeks out people from all walks of life, and that supports the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs that challenge the community and its members.**

that's pretty much what Jesus is calling the disciples to be and do. Is that what we are called in these days to do and be together? Especially in these Sundays in the fall of 2020...

Some of us may be comforted by that sign...giving mutual support for finding a place for our skills and gifts in the work of this faith community. Some may be afflicted by the challenges of this prescription for the church...just too radical, too progressive, too demanding...too much time?

Indeed, what does it mean to be a vibrant and diverse church today? Our sign says we are to: Protect the Environment? How green are our lives?

The opening photo in your website says: "This place matters."

Care for the Poor? Over these past two years with you, I've seen you give out "food bags for your backpack project, and your serving at the soup kitchen and the emergency cold weather shelter, programs you sponsor or support that care for the poor. Your working a long side the members of the Lutheran church next door for these past months handing out food to the community. How generous you are in supporting local, regional and global programs serving the poor?

Your new Mission Statement is a warm welcome. In it you say: **We exist to Love people where they are and encourage them to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.** What does it look like to Reject Racism? What will it look like to engage in really honest conversation and work that will bridge the divide between our white privileged lives and people of color? Indeed, how you continue to become an anti-racist church?

Forgive often: While forgiving another is a highly individual process, transitions in our lives and transitional times in congregations are ripe for forgiving and being forgiven. Is there someone you need to forgive?

Love God (one of your strong values) Strong worship experiences each week; Study programs focused on learning more about the Bible and God's love of us...so that we might learn how to strengthen our spiritual practices; Telling our stories to each other about how and where God is working in our lives...or how God is absent or missing from our lives.

Fighting for the Powerless: begs these questions: Who is your neighbor in the greatest need? And for whom is your heart breaking in these days?

Sharing earthly and Spiritual resources: Sharing honestly our faith stories with each other; Supporting your current pledge campaign...

And the last item on the Be the Church sign: Enjoying Life together: You do that well. That's one of the griefs we have right now in these Covid 19 times: we can't fellowship and share food and drink at the welcome table in the social room. In all this let us continue laughing and playing together. So let me ask you: Are we the best we can be at being the church that does these nine things? How can we become this church to the fullest?

>>helping each other find our gifts and talents to share >>unlocking our grip on our resources and money >>helping each other see the needs and hurts of a broken world >>helping each other put our gifts and talents and resources together with those hurts and needs. Your helping me be the best pastor I can be. My helping you be the best church you can be.

Walking along side of each other -- Sometimes stepping out in front, giving vision for what lies ahead --Then, you walk along side each other again -- in solidarity with each other -- And before you know it, the other steps out ahead to lead the way. Living out the great commandment of Jesus is embedded in your new mission statement: ***to Love people where they are and encourage them to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.***

May it be so in your lives and in your lives and in mine. Amen.