**ST MARK’S UNITING CHURCH, MORNINGTON
SUNDAY 25th OCTOBER, 2020**

**Rev. Joy Blamires**

**Email** **ljblamires@gmail.com**

 **Phone 0400 066 247**

**A LOVE WHICH MOTIVATES** Matthew 22:34-46, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

When I was working through my sense of call to the ministry, a trusted friend challenged me with the question – What motivates you? At the time I found the challenge a little unusual, Was my friend questioning my motivation? I had not really looked at what could be motivating me, other than my response to my perception of the call of God, but it was good and necessary for me to examine my motivations, and doing so gave me a firmer sense of confidence that I was responding to the call of God.

The passages we read this morning speak of differing motivations. The gospel passage comes at the end of a section. Jesus has been responding to a series of tests from the Herodians, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. This section signals an end to such dialogues, from here Jesus speaks to the crowd or to his disciples, not to these groups. Jesus also addresses the Pharisees with a question regarding the Messiah. The following chapters challenge their expectations of the Messiah and the coming kingdom of God.

In this passage the Pharisees seek to trap Jesus. Jesus had not met their expectations. He challenged their interpretation of
the Law, so a lawyer addresses a question of the law to Jesus. The question itself may see innocuous, but the author states that the question was formulated with a desire to test or trap Jesus. (The same word we encountered last week). So their desire at this point is to trap Jesus, to undermine his acceptance in the broader community. The Pharisees appear to be threatened by Jesus popularity and by the message he is conveying.

When feeling challenged we usually seek to defend ourselves, and that form of defence may manifest itself in a series of questions. The Pharisees and Sadducees were in the midst of a challenge, Jesus was teaching ideas that were at odds with their understandings.

Having our understandings challenged at the core makes us uncomfortable. However life is a journey of discovery and growth, so it can be important periodically to consider: How willing are we to have our thinking reconfigured? Grappling with questions will often lead us to a key idea or statement that will stick with us. It may indeed cause such an unsettledness that
it demands our attention, it becomes inescapable, it pushes us to reconsider our position.

Jesus responds to his inquisitors with reference to two portions of the Torah and to the Shema, (which was repeated twice daily by pious Jews).[[1]](#footnote-1) Later in his question to the Pharisees he refers to a very familiar Psalm.[[2]](#footnote-2) Jesus confronts them with their own Scriptures and their stated beliefs. He challenges them to examine that with which they are familiar, alongside the claims he has been making. They came to Jesus motivated by a desire to trap him, but he encourages them to be motivated by an openness to their own Scriptures and to possible new implications that flow from new understandings.

The content of Jesus response once again focuses on broader concepts. He gives them two broad guiding principles which they can apply to a variety of situations. Jesus summons them to be motivated by love for God and love for their neighbours. He points out that everything else hangs on this principle, the law and the words of the prophets. At the outset of his ministry Jesus had stated that he had come to fulfil the law and the prophets.[[3]](#footnote-3) Here he affirms that at the core of their teachings is this concept of loving God and loving humanity and the law and the prophets hang from this.[[4]](#footnote-4)

This idea of “loving God” is increasingly foreign to our secular society. Why would someone love God? Are they deluding themselves? Who is God? What is God like?

The supreme revelation which we have of God is Jesus. As we approach the Christmas season we think of Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us. Our considerations of the life of Jesus are motivated by a desire to know, to understand better what God is like.

We look also to the Hebrew Scriptures to encounter God and to be encountered by God. The Psalm for today was encouraging the Israelites to recognise that God was with them, and that they could see God in God’s actions. “Lord You have been our dwelling place in all generations.”[[5]](#footnote-5) “Let Your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

We express love towards God because God has reached out to us. “We love because God has first loved us”.[[7]](#footnote-7)

This is not love for a body of teaching, it is love for a Living Being. This loves flows through relationship. “We love because God has first loved us”.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Like other forms of love, this love thrives on openness. God gives of God’s self to us and we receive God through our openness. By opening ourselves to God’s love for us, we grow in our love for God.

In Jesus question to the Pharisees, he points to two aspects of his identity, “Son of David” and “Christ the Lord”.
“Son of David” reminds us of Jesus humanity, his identification with the Israelite people and of the familial style of relationship that he had with his followers. “Christ the Lord” reminds us of Jesus exalted status, One worthy of honour, One who provokes a sense of awe and obedience.

This reminds us that the God we love is both close and loving, nurturing like a parent, available and ready to engage with us; and this God is worthy of our worship, praise, awe and wonder, this God deserves our obedience.

The foundational principle of “love towards God” is far more than an erratic feeling. It is a love that necessitates action,
a wide embracing love. It is an imperative verb which relates to God’s commitment towards all creation, and God’s faithful loving kindness. This love, of necessity, flows out in love towards others, it is a generous love which is concerned for the interests and wellbeing of others.

Jesus has made it clear through story, example and teaching that this love is to embrace all, the stranger, the marginalised, even their enemies. They may not like all these people but this love is not about liking, it is about caring about the wellbeing
of others. It is about choosing to love, rather than ignoring or resenting. It is a love which pushes us out of our own self-interest.

In Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians he stated quite clearly that his motivation towards them was not from selfish inclinations like greed or trickery, but rather it came from love demonstrated in gentleness, a gentleness like that of a nurse with her children. A love that is courageous, that doesn’t stoop to using flattery. A love that is genuine, practical, much more than just words or feelings.

So now God calls us to consider how our love for God is going? To take time to consider the great love of God towards us.
To remember the nature of God, God’s grace and faithfulness. To recall God’s words of comfort and challenge. To spend time with God, to remember that our relationship with God thrives on openness.

So now God also calls us to allow love to be a guiding and motivating influence in our lives. We are called to open ourselves
to God, to grow in knowledge of God, remaining open to new revelations, to challenging ideas, to having our thinking
re-configured. To respond to the love of God towards us, with love towards God and towards all humanity. As God’s love permeates our thinking, so we can view situations differently, and God’s love can permeate our motivations.
When choices are difficult we can choose love.

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*Rev. Joy Blamires*

*25th October, 2020*

**PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE**



Loving, Gracious God

We praise and thank you our God for your love and concern for us, and the way you provide our daily needs.

Thank you that because of Jesus we are a people able to look beyond the storms of life to your guidance and care, your grace that is sufficient for our needs.

Thank you that you are a God who hears us, who delights in us, who wants us to bring our requests to you, and so we offer to you our world and all its troubles, its triumphs, its good and evil.

We pray that all people would hear your good news and respond with eager hearts to its message of hope and redemption, healing and blessing

We pray for all who are suffering through this pandemic, for countries where there is extreme poverty and need, for areas ravaged by war and greed, that people would be moved to change the way they think and realise we are a great family of humankind and what affects one affects all.

We need to care for each other, share our resources and repair our environment.

We pray for all asylum seekers and refugees, the homeless and our First Nation folk for compassion and care to be given to them.

We pray for all who are disadvantaged and marginalised and pray that wealth and resources might be shared more evenly and justly.

Help us as your people to lead the way in our own community to a more humane and inclusive society.

We pray for members of our congregation who are ill, recently bereaved or lonely.

Let us reach out to all with love and compassion.

Help us to be true to our calling and do your will, for we ask it in the lovely name of Jesus our Saviour.

Amen *Pam McKenzie*

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**Home Group Notes**

***Anyone is welcome to join with us in this time of relaxed sharing of our ideas***

***and responses to the theme we are exploring.***

Whose Image Do We Bear?

Read Matthew 22:34-45

Verses 34-35 set the scene for this story revealing some of the intent of the lawyer and the Pharisees.

How does this context effect our understanding of his question?

Discussions regarding faith in God can be more challenging when we sense that we are being “tested” by the other party.

Can we learn anything from Jesus response here that may help us in these situations?

Vs36-40. I spoke about the concept of “loving God” being foreign to our secular society. I also posed some questions that may be in people’s minds, Why would someone love God? Are they deluding themselves? Do you have any ideas on how we may communicate effectively the importance of God in our lives in a society such as this? Do you think there is a curiosity about God in our communities? Some people would see Christianity as a crutch that enables weaker people to cope with everyday life. Christians are likely to say that it is so much more than that. How could we describe the “so much more than that”?

Jesus statement to the lawyer emphasises love for God. Are there things that you can identify that have helped your love for God to grow? One key characteristic of Christian faith is that it is not about trying to please God but that we are recipients of God approaching us and loving us. We are encouraged to be open and receive from God. Are there particular practices that help you to remain open to God?

Jesus speaks also of our love for our neighbours, indeed for all humanity. This is an active practical type of love that looks to the interests and wellbeing of others. (It assumes that the person already looks to their own interests and wellbeing). People often say “I don’t like them, how can I love them?” In what ways might this understanding of loving others address this issue? The tender and loving emotions that we experience towards those who are special to us will not be replicated to all humanity. What is God calling us to here in loving others?

Vs41-45 Why do you think Jesus posed this question to the Pharisees? The question remains unanswered by the Pharisees
and by Jesus. Would you have an answer to Jesus question? I highlighted the titles Son of David and Christ the Lord as we considered this passage on Sunday. What do you understand by these titles. Do they have any particular significance to you? Vs 46 states that they did not dare to ask him any more questions after this time. Why do you think this was their response?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 Paul speaks of certain things that were not motivating his visit to Thessalonika, and alludes to the things that were motivating him. What do you see motivating Paul in his ministry here? Paul speaks of not using flattery when he came to them. As Christians we are called to encourage each other. What do you see as the difference between encouraging others and flattery? When is flattery appropriate? When does encouragement become manipulative?

Paul speaks of his gentleness and care for these people. He uses the image of a nurse and her children. Do you find this image helpful? He talks about sharing themselves with the Thessalonians what might this mean?

Joy Blamires is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Home Group Oct 29 2020 Time: 02:00 PM Melbourne Join Zoom Meeting <https://zoom.us/j/91441661378?pwd=UHp0Q1pxdlorbEZYSUxpL2FzS0lLQT09>

Meeting ID: 914 4166 1378. Passcode: 138201

One tap mobile +61731853730,,91441661378#,,,,,,0#,,138201# Australia

1. Refers to Deut. 6:5; and Lev. 19:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Psalm 110 is the most frequently quoted psalm in the New Testament writings. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Matt 5:17 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. He had affirmed in Matt 7:12 that their treatment of others should be consistent with how they would like to be treated and that this approach is consistent with the law and the prophets. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Psalm 90:1 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Psalm 90:16 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 1 John 4:19 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 1 John 4:19 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-8)