

**(Start with joke about speeding priest and policeman. I am a poor preacher. I know. I have heard you!)**

**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it; you shall love your neighbor as yourself.**

**You shall not molest or oppress the alien or orphan, for you were once aliens ourselves In the land of Egypt.**

**If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you shall return it to him before sunset; for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body. What else has he to sleep in. If he cries out to me, I will hear him, for I am compassionate!**

**The other day I was talking with a person who grew up in a very strict Baptist church, He has now joined a non-confessional church. What is a non-confessional church. One which does not have a stated set of beliefs, like the creed... I believe in God the Father, in Jesus Christ, that Jesus died and rose, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body. Nor does it have many laws or commandments.**

**He said that in his new non-confessional church, the goal is**

**Christian holiness, not following lots of laws or a list of beliefs.**

**He has a good point. Just look at the gospel today. The Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus in order to put him to death. Jesus belongs to a “confessional” faith community. They had lots of stated beliefs and laws. In fact they had over 600 laws which the Jewish people of his time were asked to follow.**

**The Pharisees were experts in the law. The law, which was originally there as guideposts to assist people in their search for holiness, often became an obstacle.**

**Jesus answers the pharisees’ question about which is the greatest law by giving his now famous answer: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Then he adds, the whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments. Jesus is saying that all the 600 laws of the Jewish community depended on these two commandments.**

**I think the person I mentioned from the non-confessional church would like Jesus’ answer. Get rid of all the laws and just fully love God and our neighbor. Doesn’t that sound pretty good? Isn’t that enough?**

**Well Jesus did not get rid of all the teachings of his faith community. He focused and consolidated them into the two great commandments. All the other laws of the community had to be seen through the lens of loving God and our neighbor.**

**But later on, Jesus would take the two great commandments of loving God and our neighbor, and reduce it to one. Love one another as I have loved you.**

**When Jesus states that everything can be summarized into one commandment, to love one another as he has loved us, he is adding a KEY, a critical twist into the reflection.**

**Keeping the laws of a confessional church or even simply seeking holiness in a non confessional church is ultimately impossible unless we have experienced the love of God in our lives. Jesus says as much: love one another AS I HAVE LOVED YOU!**

**Once we experience of having been loved by the Lord, we become open to responding in love. Only when we know the love of God can we generously allow ourselves to love God and neighbor with our whole heart.**

**Our first reading today from Exodus tells us as much. The law of Moses tells us how we should act. If someone take your neighbor's coat as a pledge of payment of a loan, give it back to him before dark because that is the only garment he has to keep him warm. That is the law.**

**But notice closely WHY that is the law. If he cries out to me, I will answer, for I am compassionate. Moses reminds the people of how God was compassionate to the when they were slaves in Egypt and how the Lord freed them and blessed them. It is because God was first compassionate with them that they should be compassionate with others.**

**And Jesus says, love one another as I have loved you!  
Shall we pray!**

**(end with spontaneous prayer)**