

20211031 sermon preached at Gisborne, 31 October 2021

Guide us, O God, by your word and Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover your peace, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Mark 12:28-34

Prism of love

The reading is about the two great Commandments – “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.” And the second is, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” We’d like to explore these Commandments through the metaphor of prism. We’ll begin with rainbow and prism first and continue to see the prism of faith, which will lead us to the prism of love.

1. rainbow & prism

Our eyes can see many colours of visible light. Sunlight is a mixture of many colours together. Light from the sun looks white to our eyes, but all colours are in white light. To see all the colours separately, we use a prism. A prism is a piece of glass or plastic in the shape of a triangle. The colours of the rainbow in order are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet – Roy G. Biv in short! A prism works because the different colours of light travel at different speeds inside the glass. For example, violet travels the slowest, so it is on the bottom, and red travels the fastest, so is on top. When the air is full of water, like after a rainstorm, the water droplets act like a prism and can make a rainbow. Rainbows are circular in shape because the prisms (raindrops) that created them are spherical.

Prism allows us to see that there are seven colours in light, not one. When it comes to faith, Jesus Christ works like a prism. In the prism of faith, we can see that each individual colour in people is from the same light - God. But we often fail to see the light as a whole from various colours, especially when we prefer one specific colour to others like scribes and Pharisees.

Prism of faith

Throughout Mark’s gospel, the scribes were always evaluating Jesus’ activities. In this sense, the scribes were like those who see things only through their favourite colour while failing to recognise the source – light. They judged Jesus theologically, charging him with “blasphemy”

because he forgave someone's sins¹; they evaluated Jesus' eating company²; some Jerusalem scribes claim he had "Beelzebul" because of his exorcising activity³; they questioned his disciples' hand-washing practices. ⁴ Eventually, they tried to capture Jesus with the help of Judas.⁵ In this hostile context, *Love God; love neighbour* - Jesus' greatest words came out that have influenced Christian tradition accordingly. Even so, at least this time, one scribe agrees with Jesus. To him, Jesus says that he is not far from the Kingdom of God. It makes us wonder what will bring him closer or even into the kingdom of God? That is, understanding what the greatest commandments are is one thing, while living by them is another. The love *Agape* is more a "doing" than a "feeling" word, although it involves both. *Agape* requires action - requires us to demonstrate our love in some practical fashion. The person who loves God will participate in worship, try to obey God, and seek opportunities to serve God. God-loving fathers and mothers will raise their children in the faith. A God-loving businessperson might run their business according to the commandments. For example, Seattle-based entrepreneur Dan Price hit the headlines around the world in 2015 when he slashed his own salary by US\$1 million so he could start paying all his employees a minimum salary of \$70,000 so that the lowest-paid employees got their pay doubled. Many people predicted that he and the company would go bankrupt. Now six years on, his company's business has tripled, and staff turnover has halved, and they've bounced back from the blow of the pandemic.⁶ All God-loving people have the opportunity to tithe. In any event, *agape* love requires practical expression which is inclusive and all-dimensional.

3. The prism of love

When the prism of faith allows us to find the light of God in different colours, the prism of love brings us freedom when we practise the love commandment. Through these Commandments, God gave us the truth of freedom - freedom not to attempt to be our own god but the call to worship the true God with all that God has given us to love God. The second commandment – "Love your neighbour as yourself" is also the call to live in freedom to love others. Firstly, it doesn't depend on give and take. God loved us first; Jesus died on the cross because he loved us until the end. We, too, love others because we received this love freely.

¹ Mark 2:7

² Mark 2:16

³ Mark 3:22

⁴ Mark 7:1, 5

⁵ Mark 14:43

⁶ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/dan-price-gravity-payments-ceo-who-slashed-his-salary-by-1-million/XNTRLR6E6LLVAM6LUPI5LUHGVQM/> Retrieved on 31 October 2021

We often see that hatred, obsession, miseries, or unhappiness are forms of imprisonment mentally and spiritually. But love commands us to love others indefinitely as it is what God intended us to live in a relationship with God in God's own image.

As such, "love your neighbour as yourself" is more than the simple respect for our neighbour's different religions, political views or lifestyle. It firstly leads us to see who we are on a deeper level. If we don't know who we are, how do we love ourselves in the first place? Scripture says that we who are called by God's name are the ones whom God created for God's glory and whom God formed and made.⁷ That is, our very existence is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever, as expressed in Westminster shorter catechism.⁸

It is why Jesus' confrontational acts against the temple system offended the religious authority greatly because Jesus' words and deeds simply revealed their unloving heart and their greed being practised under the name of God. Jesus Christ, as the prism of faith and love, always helps us to love ourselves first, thereby loving others too.

We began to talk about how a prism works. We also thought about the rainbow, and its seven colours are already in the light. In our storytime, the question was, "what happens when a rainbow goes through a prism?" By reversing the action, it may become the light! When we say that we are in Christ, we are destined to live in Christ. We offer ourselves as prisms of love. Prism doesn't discriminate colours because it knows that they are from the same light. At the same time, the presence of a prism always informs that the prism is not the light itself but only the means of conveying the light. It just lends its body to the light. Are we good as the prisms of love today? The life of the church, restructuring, and reformation of the church all depend on our being as the prisms of love. May God help us live accordingly, today and always. Amen.

⁷ Isaiah 43:7

⁸ **Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?** A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, [a] and to enjoy him forever. [b] <https://www.apuritansmind.com/westminster-standards/shorter-catechism/> retrieved on 30 October 2021