

MARK 12:28-34 THE LAW OF LOVE

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" ²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." ³² "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

In this great summary of the law, Jesus presents the true purpose of the law and the whole ritual system as the means through which we can come to know and love God. It is also a prophetic explanation of what will later happen on Calvary.

The cross of love is rooted in its vertical member, which is our relationship of love and obedience to God. It is a pillar built of the revelation of God given in his commandments and the reminders of our relationship to God and his love for us provided by observances and rituals he has given. The cross also has a horizontal beam, which is the expression of our God-obedient love to our neighbors. Through the transverse shaft we reach out and embrace the world with the love of God.

Just as the cross is made up of two separate elements, so too, is our proper relationship with God. It was Jesus nailed to the cross that graphically brought these two elements together. It is our cross-shaped obedience to God – vertically, loving God with all we are (our "body"), and horizontally, loving our neighbor as ourselves (our arms) – that reveals that the kingdom of God reigns even here and now.

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe me in your Spirit that I, reaching forth my hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen. (modified from *BCP*, 101)