November 4th – 10:30am

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Heart, Mind, Soul, Strength

1. Two unlikely characters

In our reading from the Gospel of Mark this morning, we

see two unlikely characters - a Scribe and Jesus. The Scribes are often trying to nudge Jesus, to prove him wrong, to prove themselves right, and settle some kind of religious score. The Scribes are even fighting amongst themselves, trying to get a sense of who has figured out the big theological questions. One of them stops and asks Jesus, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Ha! Will Jesus get it right?

 And Jesus, in what seems like a calm manner refers to the texts of old, the texts that the Scribes have lived by for all these years – Hear Now, O Israel, The Lord is our God, the Lord is one. This is a saying that stretches back, called the Shema, from the Torah in Deuteronomy. Jesus is speaking their language.

 And then, as we have heard, what is a very cornerstone of our faith is what Jesus recites: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbour as yourself.

 The wonderful thing here is that the scribe can’t refute it – Jesus has it right, he has no room to argue or contest. The scribe seems to soften up a bit, repeating back to Jesus what he has said and then pauses and says, “this is all more important than burnt offerings or sacrifices.” One can almost imagine the acknowledging smile on Jesus’ face when he looks at that Scribe, eye to eye, and says “You aren’t far from the Kingdom of God.” Basically, “Yes, yes, you get it. You understand.”

 And this is a major moment, for the Scribes and Jesus are never to agree, but here, in this place, this Scribe and Jesus find common ground. But saying all of this, what does it really mean to love God with all of my heart, soul, mind and strength?

1. Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength

For me, it means that I love the Lord completely, with every part of my being. It is a complete love, or at least as complete as any human love can be. But let’s think about these four pieces a little more deeply.

 What does it mean for me, for you, for us, to love with our whole heart? The mind is there to rationalize, but the heart, everything from the neck down; it is feeling and emotion. People might say that ‘trust’ is a matter of the mind, but really, it is a matter of the heart. You can feel whether you trust someone, instinctually, in your heart – the body keeps the score and the body knows. To trust God is to get past my rationalizations, my theological quandaries, and to sit and stay and feel and worship. To trust God is to acknowledge that I do not know the answers, but to pray and sense a deep sense of love and kindness and calmness from a source bigger than myself.

 Now, what about my soul? We often talk about the soul in abstract terms, often fluffy, with no real concrete understanding of what a ‘soul’ is. We often tell kids that when we die, our souls go up to Heaven, but what does that mean? Scholars throughout the ages have tried to clear this up, but maybe all this work that has lead to no where has a point – maybe, just maybe, we aren’t suppose to really know what our soul is, in its fullest measure. You can let the theologians of the ages help you figure that out. Let’s go with one theory that the work of the heart is about adoration, but the soul is more a matter of devotion. To love God with all our souls is to stay devoted, even when everything else in the world is saying that we are wrong to believe. This devotion is a faith – not a blind faith, but a faith that breathes in all the good and all the bad in the world and says, ‘God is God, and I am not.’

 To love the Lord your God with all your mind. Well, for Presbyterians, a bunch of heady academics, you would think this part comes easy. And to some extent, it does – we, perhaps like the scribes, can rationalize upwards, backwards, forwards, and upside-down. If there’s a theological or philosophical matter at hand, we like to get behind it. To love the Lord with all my mind is to dedicate my mind to the Scriptures, to thoughtfulness, to reforming, to considering, and to challenging myself to be a more engaged scholar of the Word.

 And to love the Lord your God with all your strength? There’s a difference between strength and might. Being mighty is where you get buff muscles, toned abs, and solid calves. Having strength is something else entirely – this strength is being strong in influence, in devotion, in adoration. This is where the rubber meets the road, because this is where you have to take your heart, soul, and mind and move it to action. This is where loving your God means to move your feet.

1. To love your neighbour as yourself

So now, we’ve taken a good look into what it means to love

whole heartedly – to love with your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And using all that love, in all those ways, I would ask you – do you love yourself?

 What isn’t mentioned in the Scripture, but what seems to be a prerequisite of loving your neighbour as yourself is that you have to love you. I’m not talking about a prideful, boasting, I’m the greatest creation God has ever made kind of love. I’m talking about a love that God has for us – where we give ourselves grace when days are hard, where we love the gifts and talents we have been given and find joy in them, and where we love who we are – not because of our stature in this world, but simply because we are.

 If you were to ask me honestly, “Pastor Becca, do you love yourself?” You would get a pause, and a hesitant yes. And the reason I say that is because I don’t think I’m alone in that struggle. We are our greatest critics, we live with ourselves, and love doesn’t always come easy. Yet, it’s work I know I have to do, every day, and it’s work we have to do everyday – to love ourselves, simply because God first loved us.

 If we can get there, if we can get to that healthy level of self-love – that’s where the real work of loving our neighbour can happen. For the Scribe and Jesus to find common ground was monumental in their day, so I ask, who do we need to find common ground with today?

 When there is such division, such violence, such animosities that run deeply embedded in this culture, can we love ourselves enough, can we love our neighbour enough to find some common ground? When we look at our world, we can focus upon those things that tear us apart, but can we find the things that bring us together? When we look at the base of most all religions, and see the love that is at the base, can we find togetherness even in our differences?

 So the challenge is not a small one this week, not a small one by any measure. Here are the three questions I’d like you to ask yourself this week:

1. Do you love God with your heart, soul, mind, and strength and what does that mean to you in your life?
2. Do you love yourself?
3. What action can you put into motion to show love to a neighbour that you’d otherwise find challenging?

Easy? Right? Well, this is one of the crux of the Gospel, of

 the faith we believe in, and so this is important work, for you, and for me, so that the Kingdom of God draws near. Amen.