



Matthew 22:37-38

Regional Gathering

Saturday, October 14, 2023

Disciples Ministry Center
Fullerton, California

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SESSION ONE: WITH ALL/CON TODO

As we stand, in times of testing, post-pandemic weariness, wider cultural shifts, health challenges, and imagining the church in a new way for a new day. We are directed to bring together all of who we are, heart, soul, and mind with our Love for God. Our 2023 regional gathering will be a time to reflect upon this calling, and to gather and celebrate our regional life in covenantal love and action. Our intention is to host and cultivate spaces for connection, dialogue, and growth. We imagine that transformation begins with our own healing or wholeness, relationship with God and each other. Prayerfully, turned **with all** our being and best to the mission and ministry ahead. **#WithAllPSWRDisciples**

Welcome to Session One of WITH ALL! We are pleased to provide two sessions of study for you and your congregation around the motivation for our 2023 Regional Gathering and homework in preparation for the 2024 Regional Assembly. Your two sessions are the following: With All– Matthew 22:37 and Love Your Neighbor – Matthew 22:38. It is our hope you will find the two study sessions a source of nourishment, encouragement, and spiritual connection.

Let us pray together....

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Prayer

Holy God, your movement in the world is that of love.

Nothing is excluded, no one is abandoned, and you continue to offer yourself fully unto all creation.

Teach us through your Spirit, of what it means to love You ever more, teach us how to love one another more authentically, and to love the whole world without exclusion or self-righteousness.

We take refuge that we are able to love, because You have first loved us and continue to do so for eternity.

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Scripture

34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.

35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37 Jesus replied: ““Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (NRSV)



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In preparation of our reflection on this verse, it is important to recount the brief historical context of the gospel of Matthew and its' connection to the Hebrew Scriptures. The book can be dated to 85-90 CE and many

scholars attest it was composed in Antioch. A preliminary reading of this gospel depicts Jesus as a New Moses, with clear illusion and connections to Jesus' Jewish roots and ancestry throughout.

It is important to name that Matthew was writing to a predominantly Jewish-Christian audience and many of his listeners would have picked up on the ways it is rooted in culturally specific undertones and nuances. This is something that Christian readers often miss and in the worst cases, results in anti-semitic interpretations of the text.. Thus, our goal is to counter and dismantle the ways in which texts from the New Testament have been used to support interpretations that promote supersessionist readings of Christian texts. To do this, we begin our reflection by highlighting the ways in which Jesus draws deliberate connections to his own cultural and religious tradition.

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First, Matthew begins by tracing Jesus' genealogy and connecting his lineage to Abraham. Later, Jesus in Matthew's gospel demonstrates how Jesus' teachings connect to the Hebrew scripture. In our text, there is a stark connection and yet difference between Jesus' statement and scriptures from the Torah. See below.

Matt 22: 37 says, “*Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*”

Deut 6:5, says, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*”



It is interesting to note, that while Deut 6:5 uses Love your Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, the version paraphrased by Jesus takes the liberty to replace “strength” with “mind.” One implication of this is that Jesus models for us two things:

1) our traditions are important to know and respect and 2) part of our task as religious people is to take what we have received and make it our own. In this spirit, Jesus does not dismiss his own cultural and spiritual tradition to create an “original law,” but rather chooses to consciously embrace the teaching or law that he received and re-present it to the world in ways that resonate with his own experience. In doing so, Jesus demonstrates to us as religious leaders the importance of adapting and critically thinking about the teachings, rituals, traditions, and narratives that have been handed down to us by our ancestors.

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Discussion Questions:

1. What are values, teachings, or narratives that you have inherited or find being passed down to you?
2. What do you perceive as positive about what you have received?
3. What have you pushed back against or resisted within your tradition?

When Deuteronomy was written, the historical context is that Israel is encamped on the Plains of Moab and they are getting ready to enter the Promised land. Thus, in this context, strength or might is appropriate. Meanwhile, in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus' context was different. Jesus creatively adapts his message to fit the context and issues of his time. He receives the teaching and presents it in a way that is "almost but not quite," the same.

With the Pandemic we also found ourselves in a totally "new" era. The pandemic forced us to rethink things we had taken for granted. Simple things like touch, breath, oxygen, and space had suddenly become precarious. The Pandemic brought humanity to a halt overnight, making us aware of our vulnerability. Humanity was largely rendered powerless- all thanks to a tiny, invisible to the naked eye, infinitesimal virus. The pandemic also exposed to us the reality that the conditions of our societies are not just.

While some of us could "Work from home", many members of the working class, the racially minoritized, and migrant workers continued to provide "essential services" at their own risk. The pandemic invited many of us to reckon with ourselves and the ways our heart, mind, and soul have been divided or mis-given. Following the path of Jesus, who was in touch with his time, we are called as a human community to find ways to heal, connect, and co-create new worlds in response to the pandemic. We are being called to find a new way together.

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Discussion Questions:

1. What changes have you made through the pandemic? (attitude, career, where to live, etc)?
2. What new values have emerged for you? What habits or practices have you sought to let go of?

In following the Spirit of Christ, and the call to loving God with all—we are called to reflect on how we have gotten to this point and to pay attention to the new that God is leading us toward. While we may only see glimpses of this, it is important to share what we sense with one another because we will only accomplish love, when it is in relationship with ALL.



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Final question

Q. What might it look like to engage our traditions with creativity and courage to offer “fresh approaches” in solidarity with our time?

In the words of the sacred texts, we find,
A call to love with heart, soul, and the mind,
"Love God with strength and all your might,",
Jesus proclaimed, his tradition in his heart, he had retained.

He cherished what his roots had clearly shown,
In ancestral stories, Jesus found the seeds of wisdom deeply sown,
Not crafting laws entirely fresh and new,
But with an open heart, His insight grew.

So let us learn,
To unlearn, renew, and earnestly discern,
With love and minds, in unity's embrace,
Our sacred stories, God's eternal grace.

Embrace our heritage, let our wisdom bloom,
Adapt and ponder, dispel the gloom,
In blending old and new, our paths will unfold,
To God's eternal truth, as our spirits hold.

