

# Jordan Station United Church

October 31, 2021

Rev. Anita Spiller

Sermon: "Run, Jimmy, Run!"

(Mark 12:28-34)

Happy Halloween. Truth be told, I love Halloween. Not just because of the candy (aero bars and potato chips) plus the costumes and the creativity of children young and old but because of the way the neighbourhood comes together. Many of my neighbours have been out decorating, hanging pumpkin lights, cleaning walkways and getting ready. It is a wonderful example of disciples getting ready to serve and love their neighbours. I also love it because front doors are thrown open and people sit on their front stoops. They chat amongst themselves and get connected. They get back to basics just like today's scripture.

Today's passage starts off sounding straight forward and pretty basic. "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answers by citing Deuteronomy 6:4 "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" Today's version from Mark's adds and "with all your mind," 12:30).

But then Mark takes a surprising turn. To the question of what is the (single) most important commandment, he adds a second commandment. One that he draws from Leviticus 19:8, that you should also love your neighbor as yourself.

This combining together of these two laws had never been done before. There is no record of anyone ever linking the two commandments together in this way. No one. It seems so obvious to us today, because we have heard them linked since we were first in Sunday School, but no one until Jesus had ever seen that linkage before.

But, what does it mean?

To, me the point that Jesus was making is that you cannot have one without the other. The love of God empowers you—drives you—to love your neighbor. And loving the neighbor means that ultimately you are loving God. They are two sides of the same coin, therefore, in a very real sense, they are actually ONE commandment.

The problem is that in our lives, we don't always get that right. Some of us emphasize one half of this dual commandment, and others emphasize the other. It's true that sometimes the emphasis ought to fall on the first half and at another time it ought to fall on the other, but never to the total exclusion of one over the other.

If we try to be Christians without working to alleviate hunger and poverty and racism and ageism in the world, we are denying the core of the Bible. On the other hand, if we ONLY spend our Christian lives working for issues of justice and hunger, and poverty and equality and equity, and environmentalism, then eventually we will dry up and blow away, our heart will become empty and meaningless. We have to have the spirit of God within us or else we will not have the energy to do the work of the Gospel. This isn't a binary issue rather, it is both and!

Sometimes over emphasis on the love of neighbor can result in the neglect of love of God. It can become social work instead of praise or worship, or prayer, or meditation. We can become empty givers instead of spirit filled receivers. "The commands to love God totally and to love our neighbors as ourselves stand at the very heart of our faith." Not so simple a scripture after all.

Every church should reach out in mission work for the community and for the world. I am very proud the work that we have accomplished together in the past 6+ years. Together we raised close to \$25,000 for water projects in the Dominican Republic. Together we have raised \$10,000 for the Cave Springs Legacy Hall. We have sponsored dozens of children and families with the Village of Hope along with food and clothing. We have made a difference in lives of migrant workers by offer benevolent funds when their families members died. And finally, we have supported the Upper Deck Youth Programs with funds and our gifts of time. And if that weren't enough, each and ever year we have given more to the United Church Mission & Service Fund then the year before.

When I first came to Jordan Station, my mentor Rev. Peter Hoyle gave me this nugget of wisdom. Love and feed them he said and leave everything else in God's hands. What he meant is that people can't serve if they aren't filled with the spirit so fill them with God's love and watch them soar.

A few weeks again, Rev. Pete died suddenly. I haven't mention it because it has been far too painful. He was my mentor, my friend and my partner in the fight for justice for those living on the margins. I imagine that on the night of his passing as he was taking his last breath, I bet he was giving thanks to God for an incredible life. He loved Jesus more than anyone I have every met. The words thank you Jesus were always on the tip of his tongue. He used to say, I can't wait to die so I can meet Jesus. Some of you might recall that Rev. Pete preached during our covenanting service. That day six years ago when we made promises to one another to support each other in ministry. It seems appropriate that since the story he preached on is today's lectionary. My apologies to those who remember it. If you do, you know when to chime in.

There was a twelve-year-old boy named Jimmy who loved to go the park with his father. A walk always took time because Jimmy had a physical disability that meant he dragged one leg behind him. He and his dad would often play baseball when they arrived as Jimmy was a huge fan. On this particular day, when they arrived at the park there was a pick-up game of baseball going on. When Jimmy saw them, he asked his dad if he thought the group of boys might let him play. His dad, took a breath and said a prayer and said well, let's find out. To both of their surprise, the boys were eager to include him and immediately put him in left field. Jimmy played the inning, never coming anywhere near the ball but having a wonderful time. It was the bottom of the ninth and Jimmy's team was losing 4 to 1 and it was their turn to bat. They were in the middle of the batting order and three boys went up to bat and all of them got on base. So, picture it, the bases are loaded and they are losing by three and whose name do they call to bat next? Jimmy!

So, Jimmy jumps up and dragging his bad leg behind him he enters the batter's box. The first two pitches are strikes and Jimmy's dad has this sinking feeling that this is not going to end well. But then in a moment of grace, the pitcher throws one in, much slower than normal and right in the middle of the strike zone. Jimmy swings the bat and hits it. It wasn't hit very hard so it rolls very slowly to the short stop. Jimmy hasn't started to run yet so the crowd gives him encouragement yelling "Run, Jimmy, Run" and off he goes slowly making his way to first base. The short stop throws it to the second baseman but misses by a mile and it goes flying out to right field. Jimmy at this point is rounding toward first base and the crowd yells, "Run, Jimmy, Run" and off he goes toward second. The outfielder is scrambling to get the ball which is now buried in the corner and launches it back towards home but it only makes it as far as first base. The crowd is still chanting "Run, Jimmy, Run" and Jimmy begins to round third base, being encouraged by the third base coach and the crowd. By this time all three of the runners have crossed home plate and the score is tied 4 to 4. So, Jimmy is running and the ball is at first base. The ball is thrown towards the back catcher and Jimmy is running for his life. For one final time the crowd screams, "Run, Jimmy, Run". He crosses home plate and looks up at the umpire who announces him safe as the ball was thrown way over the head of the back catcher. Jimmy had won the game and was now being surrounded by his young team mates with cheers of congratulations.

That for me said Rev. Pete, is the very best example of what it means to love God and love our neighbour. For me, "Run, Jimmy Run" is a mantra that have held onto for the past six years as the foundation of what I hoped we could together at Jordan Station. It is important to study the bible, to

pray and to worship our God in order to feed our minds, hearts and spirits. But we also have to take this love that God has given us into the world. For it is in the act of seeking justice and offering kindness that we can truly be loving people of God.

It is my prayer for this week that we will end our pastoral relationship, the way it began. Asking the questions Who is God? Who is our Neighbour and what is God calling us to do? I pray that might continue to chant the words "Run, Jimmy, Run" each morning when you wake up. I pray that you will enter the world with open eyes looking for the Jimmy amongst us wherever we go. So, I challenge you this week to say hello to your neighbour, smile at a stranger and encourage all those you meet. Take it one day at a time, one person at a time because if every there is going to be change in the world it has to begin with you. Thanks be to God, Amen!