



# First Mennonite Church

## Midweek E-Newsletter

February 1, 2023

### From Pastor Tom

#### The Greatest Commandment

*“When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’” (Matthew 22:34-36)*

It was a tricky question. By Jesus’ day, the number of commandments in the Torah had grown from twelve to 613. How could one of those be more important or “greater” than any other? The Pharisees were hoping Jesus’s answer would back himself into a corner so that they would have a way to discredit him, if not charge him with some serious offense like blasphemy. Jesus gave them not one but two commandments as being the greatest. The first was the so-called *Shema* (Hebrew for the command to “hear”) from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. While it wasn’t one of the original ten commandments it was one of the most important, if not the most important verses in Jewish Scripture, focusing on the entreaty (ostensibly from Moses to the people of Israel) to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. It would indeed be hard to discredit Jesus for giving that as his answer.

But he didn’t stop there. He added to his answer another commandment, one perhaps a bit more obscure, from Leviticus 19:18: “love your neighbor as yourself.” This commandment was within a larger context of things to do and not to do to one’s “neighbor” or fellow member of the covenant community. It had seemingly nothing to do with God. How could it be one of the greatest commandments in Scripture?

We’ve all heard of the distinction between the “letter” and “spirit” of the law—between a literal reading of the words comprising a given law, and an interpretation of that law, seeking to clarify its intent. We’ve all heard of instances where a literal interpretation of something can end up missing its bigger-picture essence. In his answer to the Pharisees’ question, Jesus prioritized love as lying at the heart of God’s will for His people—love between God and His people, certainly, a love that must flow both ways, but also between God’s people themselves. Regardless of whether it technically represents one commandment or two, Jesus helpfully and for all time summed up the spirit or essence of Torah down to a single word.

That wasn’t the last time that Jesus and the Pharisees would get into it over the letter versus the spirit of the law more broadly, or a given commandment more specifically. In fact, the fourth commandment of the original ten, “Honor the Sabbath and keep it holy,” came up

frequently in the Gospels. And once again, at issue was the spirit of that law verses the letter. The Pharisees seemed to get repeatedly stuck on the letter of the Fourth Commandment, leaving Jesus to repeatedly have to interpret its spirit. And in our time, while the Sabbath has continued to be important to the Jewish faith, in Christianity it seems to have lost some of its relevance (and certainly its edge). Do we even have a Sabbath? And if so, what does it mean for us to honor it?

This coming Sunday, as a conclusion to the sermon series on a Spiritual Diet Plan (subtitled "We Are What We Eat") I'm going to focus on Sabbath, and consider whether honoring or observing (or "remembering") it might indeed be vital to our spiritual health, not just as individuals but as a church. Hope to see you then. ☺

*Tom*

## Verse of the Week:

John 20:21 – ***"Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."***

## Among Our Friends and In Our Prayers

- ☞ Pray for all **those facing uncertain diagnoses or prognoses.**
- ☞ Pray for those who will be **travelling.**
- ☞ Thank God for **Pastor Tom's faithfulness** to God's call to ministry and pray for him as he continues to wait upon God for His next directions.
- ☞ Pray for **our whole "body"** (FMC) as we listen to the Holy Spirit and communicate together.
- ☞ Lift up to our Lord our **Ministry and Vision Councils as well as Western District leadership.** Vision meets on the 6<sup>th</sup> and ministry meets with WDC on the 8<sup>th</sup>.
- ☞ **WDC Request:** Pray for wisdom and insight for the WDC Executive Board, as it implements action steps growing out of its anti-racism audit completed last year.

## Upcoming Events

- ☞ **This Saturday night! Youth Group Swim Party** – We have the Marion pool reserved from 5-6pm. Meet at the church at 4:30 to car pool. Contact Jan Amstutz or Sue Buchholz with questions.

- ☞ **February 7 – Bethel College Organ Recital Series** presents David Pickering, organ, and Audrey Pickering, cello and organ, 7 pm in a program featuring works by J.S.Bach, Lubeck, Alain, Bloch and Gawthrop, in the Administration Building chapel.

## Other Announcements

- ☞ **Hosting Goshen College Chamber Choir:** Thanks to your wonderful support, we will be blessed to enjoy a concert on Sunday night, **February 26<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm** with this 38-voice choir. Invite your friends and neighbors!
- ☞ Hello from **Western District Women in Mission!** We are inviting women from your church to have a table at the 2023 Women in Mission Celebration at Faith Mennonite Church in Newton on Saturday, April 1 from 10 am – 1 p.m. The event is sponsored by Western District Women in Mission as a means to share ideas and mission opportunities with other women and churches. Perhaps your church has a formalized women's group or women who are doing other types of ministries and activities in your church and community such as book/Bible studies, vacation Bible school or other activities for children in your church or community, craft groups, etc. Whatever women are doing in your church to further Christ's kingdom, come and share it so others can learn, be inspired, and maybe even start something similar in their churches. If you would be interested in having a table or would like more information, e-mail [westerndistrictwomen@gmail.com](mailto:westerndistrictwomen@gmail.com). Reserve your table by March 1. Thanks!
- ☞ **MCC is seeking a Donor Relations Associate:** This role is responsible for assisting in the implementation of the donor relations strategy for MCC Central States by stewarding major donors involving face-to-face contact to meet the budgeted income goals and generate the necessary resources to accomplish the mission of MCC. This is a full-time position; office location is flexible. Apply online by February 24 at [mcc.org/donor-relations-associate](http://mcc.org/donor-relations-associate). For more information contact Amber Falcón at 574-534-4133 or [amberfalcon@mcc.org](mailto:amberfalcon@mcc.org).
- ☞ **MCC Central States annual meeting**, March 4 from 1-3 p.m. at MCC in North Newton, Kansas. This will primarily be an in-person event, but if you would like a link to join via Zoom please email [tinaschrag@mcc.org](mailto:tinaschrag@mcc.org) for the link.
- ☞ **Volunteer with MCC Thrift today!** You can support the relief development and peace work of Mennonite Central Committee AND your local community when you volunteer at your local [MCC Thrift](#) shop! By volunteering, you'll make friends, gain work experience, and help make a difference in your community and around the world. From sorting to pricing to working the cash register, we've got a job that's right for you. Sign up to volunteer [thrift.mcc.org/volunteer](http://thrift.mcc.org/volunteer)!