

In today's readings we are reminded to love God above everything else and with a stronger devotion than we have for anything else. We're told this in Deuteronomy and we're told again in the gospel with the command "You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

In the Jewish tradition, this command to love God so completely, called the Shema, was such an important one that Jewish communities today, thousands of years later, still say it twice daily (morning and night) as part of their prayers. The Shema is a reminder of how important God is to our lives and how important it is for us to love God more than anything. For God loves us so much, isn't it only right that we love God back equally?

It struck me as I started writing this reflection, that the members of the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh who were slaughtered as they worshipped last week, likely uttered the Shema the morning of their deaths. In saying the Shema that morning they were focused on loving God above all else – so much so that during the attack, a physician who was a member of the synagogue, rather than running to save himself, **lived** the Shema in the moments of the shooting as he ran towards people to help them with no care

for his own safety – he gave his life out of love for his neighbour and for God.

In today's gospel, Jesus reminds the scribes about the Shema and its importance. He also throws in a commandment of "Love your neighbour as yourself" for good measure too. Not only is Christ reminding them of the Shema but he's telling a group of people for whom rite and ritual is everything and a community not open to helping others as much as looking out for themselves, that they're off course. That LOVE – love for God and love for their neighbour comes above everything else.

Sometimes these days, it as if we haven't moved forward much from ancient times. You only have to look at Twitter or the comments section on Facebook...those are places often devoid of any signs of actual love or concern for one another. One only has to watch the news to feel like we are sliding backwards into that same era of self-preservation that existed during Christ's time on earth. It would be easy to become bogged down by all the negative images and comments out there, but then, I'm reminded of something I heard from a Presbyterian minister who also happened to have a children's show called Mr. Rogers Neighbourhood. Fred Rogers once shared

that when he heard things in the news as a child that scared him his mother would remind him to look for the helpers in times of trouble. He found that helpful and remembered it later on as an adult when he was faced with difficult times. And what better way to show love for each other in ordinary times as well as times of crisis than to step forward and help.

I have to tell you that as I had just finished writing this last paragraph, I came across an article from The Atlantic magazine which posited that Mr. Rogers likely never meant for adults to use “look for the helpers” as a mantra in tough times at all. He stated that we infantilize each other when we use that expression. So, as I started to hit the backspace button on my keyboard to delete what I wrote about Mr. Rogers, it occurred to me that, like the scribes in Christ’s time, this author was focused on the wrong things. He was caught up in tearing the down the modern day message of how we live our love for God and one another.

I think that love for God and neighbour is found in the helpers and I think that the “look for the helpers” statement is actually a modern day call to action much like that of the ancient Shema – and there’s so much hope for the world in that.

So how do **we** answer that call to action of the Shema and Mr. Rogers?
Especially in such difficult times where poverty, hatred, fear and unkindness
seem to be more prevalent?

We look for the helpers....

We show love for God through our actions....

We BECOME the helpers....

After the shootings at Tree of Life Synagogue last week,
the Muslim community in Pittsburgh, (remembering that the Muslim and
Jewish communities have been at odds with each other politically for
millennia) raised over \$60,000 dollars to help the families and victims of the
shootings mere hours after the attacks. Not only did they raise money but
publicly stated that they were available to help out with meals, to be present
if people were scared to go out alone – They were quoted as saying: “We
just want to know what you need ... If it's people outside your next service
protecting you, let us know. We'll be there." Instead of being relieved that
their community wasn't being attacked and keeping a low profile, they
stepped forward and showed their love for God and neighbour through their

presence and their actions. They said that they did it because they wished to live their faith which says to “repel evil by that which is better.” Which means to LOVE. They lived their faith’s version of the Shema that we’re reminded of this morning.

In Toronto yesterday (*Saturday, Nov. 3rd, 2018*) and around the country, Muslim communities organized human circles of peace and love surrounding synagogues as members of Jewish congregations attended Temple.

Look for the helpers.

Loving God and our neighbour doesn’t have to be complicated, life-threatening or grandiose either...we do it here at St. Joe’s all the time through our ministries along with the staff and volunteers who support them. All of these ministries are the living embodiment of loving God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our mind and all our strength and of loving our neighbours as ourselves.

With that in mind, a working group is beginning to explore the needs of our parish from a health and wellness perspective. It’s an opportunity once again, to show our love for one another, and to find new ways of supporting

and caring for those in our diverse community. The Health and Wellness Working Group have created a survey to assess the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of the parishioners of St. Joe's in order to gain a better understanding of what those needs might be and to provide direction to explore specific health and wellness programs/projects within the parish. You'll find in your bulletins a link to the survey that you can do at home or or, if you're not keen on doing things online, we have paper copies of the survey at the back of the church for you to fill out. The surveys are an important first step in assessing what next steps we might take in order to support the health and wellness needs of our parish community. An opportunity for us to live the Shema here at St. Joe's – to be the helpers.

Maybe the way we love God and our neighbours– the way we live the ancient Shema - really is as simple as BEING the helpers – of answering that call to action from ancient times to today's modern times. Maybe we, like the scribes and The Atlantic magazine reporter, sometimes need a reminder to recognize and return to the simplicity of the message to love God and our neighbours fully.