

A scribe, one of the Jewish religious professionals

charged with keeping & maintaining the sacred scriptures, upon hearing his colleagues

grill Jesus with questions ... cuts to the quick and asks: *Which commandment is first of all?*

Jesus then recites the She'ma (bring in music here... softly at first then increasing in volume) ... the She'ma,

the central prayer of the Jewish Prayer Book ... a recitation said twice a day because it is

the bedrock, the foundation, and core of all that Jews believe, of all that is Jewish.



(Screen 1)

The She'ma ... sacred words, many times put to music to intensify its importance.

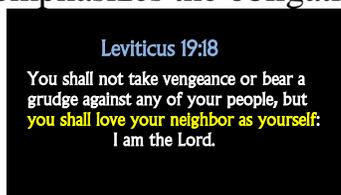
(Let music play with the words of the She'ma on screen, Erin sings through 2 times)

But Jesus does more (lowering volume of music bring it to a close) ... Jesus

adds meat and specificity to the She'ma, he says: *The 2nd [command] is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.*

Actually, he gets this from the climactic chapter of the Torah,

Leviticus 19:18 which emphasizes the obligation to be holy in our dealings with our fellow



human beings: (Screen 2) **grudge against any of**

You shall not take vengeance or bear a your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

The Golden Rule

So we could say, Jesus adds what we know as the (Screen 3) "Golden Rule",

do unto others as you would have them do unto you ... not unique to Jesus as it's been expressed in different ways throughout antiquity:

"Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself." – [Confucius](#)
"That which you hate to be done to you, do not do to another." – [from ancient Egypt](#)
"Do not do to others what would anger you if done to you by others." – [Isocrates](#)
"What you avoid suffering yourself seek not to impose on others." – [Epictetus](#)

But what Jesus does do that is uniquely Jesus,

(Screen 4)



is that he attaches the “Golden Rule” to the She’ma ... love of God and love of neighbor cannot be separated – honoring one is honoring the other; violating one is violating the other.

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And so it is ... we Christians

regard the She’ma and the “Golden Rule” as foundational to our faith,
what we believe, and
all that is Christian.

When the scribe

says to Jesus after Jesus (in an unprecedented way) connects the She’ma with the

Golden Rule ... the scribe comments: **‘You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that “he is one, and besides him there is no other”; and “to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength”, and “to love one’s neighbor as oneself”,—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.**

To that, Jesus says: **‘You are not far from the kingdom of God’ ... and here’s the reason Jesus says you are not “FAR” from the Kingdom of God.**

Ever seen this comic strip?

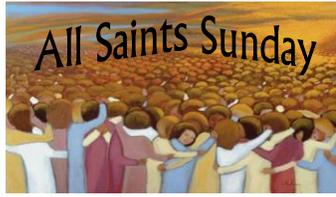
(Screen 5)



I think we all get it ... we may laugh, but we know it’s true

Humankind as an abstraction, as a concept

is easy to love; but specific individual people – with a name and a face and with



On this All Saints Sunday ... the people

we honor today were not perfect 100 percent Kingdom of God People either ... but what we honor today are the times when they did live as Kingdom of God People, the times when their love for others showed their love for God, the times when their service in the church furthered the ministry the church ... though (like all of us) they were saint & sinner both, we honor the times their God-given humanity witnessed to the love of God.

Jesus' words to the scribe are Jesus' words to us:

You are not FAR from the Kingdom of God

This is both an appraisal of our human condition & a call to live She'ma & the "Golden Rule"

Can we do it perfectly and all the time ... ***obviously not*** ... we all have a bit of Linus in us.

But we also have Jesus ... who's life and ministry,

his death and resurrection ... is the embodiment, the flesh & blood of She'ma & the "Golden Rule"

Being part of a community of faith that takes seriously Jesus' ministry, that's the training ground

to learn She'ma and the Golden Rule ... and the community of faith is also the "launch pad"

for bringing She'ma out into the world ... **that's our job** – to love God & to love our neighbor.

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One more thing ... throughout the week as I was putting this message together for the

Screen 9



sermon today, my mind was always on the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in

Pittsburgh, my home town – Not only because it was in the news a lot, but also because I was working with these words from the Jewish scriptures.

I know they are part of our Christian scriptures too, but the Jews have been working and living with these words of the She'ma thousands of years longer than we Christians.

That shooting took place at 9:45 a.m.

as the congregation gathered for the Saturday morning Shabbat service ... in the Shabbat service there is a build-up to saying the She'ma, as it is the most central of all Jewish prayers.

I wonder if they ever got to that part of the service before this horrific incident occurred.
I wonder if the words of the She'ma passed across the lips of worshippers before gunshots were fired.
I wonder if those who were murdered that morning had a chance to say the She'ma one last time.

I wonder

In the event that the (Music begins here) recitation of the She'ma was interrupted that Saturday morning, or even if it wasn't ... we will sing it together here this morning to be in solidarity with that congregation for one thing, to pay respect to those who were killed for another, and ultimately to honor the one God who created us all, the one God who suffers with us and can bring healing to our pain .

The prayer begins with these words: Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One.

Screen 10  (Erin sings through once, then congregation sings 2x following the singing music continues to play softly until the conclusion of the sermon)

Jesus' addition of, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" to the She'ma ... these become words of protest,



words of judgment, and Screen 11
words of action for all those who love GOD ... to denounce in every way the hatred & hostility that takes lives and divides us one from another. AMEN.