

So is it more likely that you will do the right thing because someone tells you it is the law or because you have an understanding of the situation and people who are effected by the law? Almost universally people act differently when they are allowed to or have to understand the situation and people involved. The answer many of us heard growing up, "Because I said so", generally only satisfies for a brief period of our lives - till maybe the age of 4, right? After that, we need a connection, a grounding deeper than just "it is the law" - or "it is the Commandment."

Jesus is brilliant in his answer to the "scholar of the law" who tests Jesus with the question, "*Which commandment in the law is the greatest?*" Jesus doesn't call upon one of the 10 Commandments, as some might have expected. Yet he does pull from two, distinct Jewish laws to answer the question. Both are based in the idea of relationship, centered in love itself. Love God first. Second, Love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus puts them together - the second is like the first, he says. Love. The first does not really exist without the second. The first letter of John says if anyone says he loves God but hates his neighbor, he is a liar. Love. Not a feel good, or an easy thing to do, but one that requires relationship. Being in that relationship - with God and with others - opens the door to truly living out the commandments and not merely obeying them. (teens: law about sex)

Next weekend we will be kicking off our Capital Campaign for the work of the Church throughout the Diocese of Reno. It is called "Today, Tomorrow, Together". In some of the pre-meetings for this occasionally we would hear the question, "what's in it for my parish?" It gave an opportunity for reflection on the fact that we are one Church. We show our love for God when we show our love for one another. One important way we do that is by supporting the work of the Church from parish to parish through the diocese. There are many examples in our parish of loving our neighbor, like those willing to participate in the homeless shelter project or the St. Vincent de Paul Society, reaching out to the poor or for those teaching our faith to our children and adults seeking the Lord. Entering into relationship with those who, maybe, start as strangers, allows us to live into a relationship of love. Love God. Love neighbor. Love yourself.

The last line in the gospel passage we hear today beautifully calls attention to how we really live out the way of God when Jesus says, "*The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.*" The law is what is written. The prophets call us into relationship. We hear the "law" in the first reading: do not oppress an alien, help the widow and the orphan and the poor. That's the law. Over the centuries it is the prophets who call the people into living it out by challenging the people to open their eyes and to see and embrace their neighbor in mutual love and respect - no matter their status or country or language or religion or gender. All of Jesus' teaching builds on the prophets. Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Some people will say it is hard to be a Christian, too many laws and requirements. Yet these two sum up all the rest. In order to make sense, the others should flow from love. Love will motivate us to be imitators of the One who created us in pure love. "*Love the Lord, your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself.*"