

Dispensation of Love

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Caldwell Presbyterian Church

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Text: Mark 12:28-36

Today the Presbyterian Church (USA) and other denominations across the country have set aside this weekend to speak out against Gun Violence. Gun violence Prevention Sabbath is an opportunity for the body of Christ to speak out on the issue of gun violence in our local community and world. Gun violence is an issue that affects us directly and indirectly, and readily breaks into the tapestry of our lives on a continual basis.

We can recall a recent act of gun violence which involved a beloved member of our congregation. On January 25<sup>th</sup> a member of our family, Mike Middleton, was shot and killed by a man that he sponsored through Narcotics Anonymous. Then later that day Robby McNeil, a 19 year old, college student and member of Covenant Presbyterian church, was shot in the head and injured by a thief in a home robbery in Wilmington, NC. The instances have tragically affected our congregations and compelled us to speak out on this issue.

These stories are not the only stories I hear regarding instances of gun violence. Just yesterday a fellow seminarian shared that a member of her congregation, who is an investigator has limited opportunities to come to worship because she is often times investigating murders in Charlotte. The investigator reports that in the past month there

has been at least one murder every Saturday in Charlotte. Another story was told to me yesterday about two friends that got in an argument and the one friend shot the other in the heat of anger. The person telling this story felt that if the person wouldn't have had access to a gun this wouldn't have happened. When I hear stories like these and experience the immense pain and sorrow associate with violence, I am inclined to plead "Lord have mercy!" Lord, Have mercy on our broken world. Have mercy on a world where "shoot outs" now occur in spaces long considered safe havens: high school cafeterias, college campuses, malls, community centers, playgrounds, gym clubs, even church sanctuaries and our homes. Lord have mercy!

Have mercy on America in a time where gun violence has escalated to persistently astonishing levels, consistently about 30,000 deaths per year.

Currently there are about 270 million privately owned firearms in the United States. If they were evenly distributed, almost every woman, man, and child in the entire population would possess a gun. We are, as a country, armed and dangerous—to ourselves. Lord have mercy!

Caldwell I ask, what will we do? We are presented with a charge and a call to act. We cannot sit silently as our children's schools are invaded with guns, our streets are infiltrated with violence, and as our neighborhoods succumb to shoot outs. The gospel message is clear, you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself.' This is the most important commandment.

At the beginning of this text the scribe over hears Jesus' conversation with the Sadducees and interprets that he answers him according to the law therefore the scribe, whom Mark presents as a unified political group opposing Jesus, asks Jesus a question. The scribe says, "Which commandment is the first of all?" The "first" means most important. So the official of the law is asking Jesus which commandment is the most important. Jesus replies, "The first is Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one;" This opening phrase is taken from the Shema. Shema, meaning hear, is a three part prayer contained in the Old Testament scriptures of Deuteronomy and Numbers. Jews recite this prayer every morning and evening. It is the central prayer in the Jewish prayerbook and is often the first prayer Jewish children learn. The central emphasis is on the exclusive loyalty to God, and oneness of God. This prayer points one to recognize God, be loyal to and obey the only God.

Then Jesus says: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' There are four markers identified here. The four markers are heart, soul, mind and strength. The four markers indicate the use of ones entire being and resources to be devoted to the love of God.

<sup>31</sup> The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." We must love humanity which is our duty.

So in essence the scripture is saying First recognize God, be loyal and obey the only God. Love God with your entire being and resources and then love humanity as yourself, this is your duty.

The text so implies love can be fulfilled through relationship, relationship with God and one another. A relationship that passionately transcends legal obligation and demands dimensions and resources of one's being.

One evening as I was flipping through the channels, I came across a very familiar movie entitled "Boyz in Hood". How many of you have seen this movie? The movie is about a group of childhood friends growing up in a Los Angeles ghetto. In this particular scene, Rickie and Tre are returning home from the store when they noticed a car of local gangsters whom they had a previous altercation with the day before following them. They decided to split up with hopes in not encountering the gangster. Rickey and Tre' split up in an alley way close to their home. As Rickie is coming out of the alley the car of gang members pull in front of the alley entrance and open fire on Rickie. Rickie is killed. Dough Boy, Rickie's brother, comes up soon after the drive by shooting and finds Tre' weeping over his friend's body. The boys retrieve the body and take him home to the mother, girlfriend and child. Tre' whispers to Dough boy "Meet me at my house in 5 mins. Tre' and Dough boy are making plans to retaliate. Tre' goes to his Father's room, loads a hand gun as his father is coming home, and neighbors inform the father of what has happened. The father enters the home as Tre' walks out of his room with a fully loaded gun ready to retaliate. His father stops him at the door and says, "So you big and bad now, you want to shot somebody. Here shot me." Tre is silent while holding the gun tight. His Father continues to ask him for the gun. Tre' finally hands the gun over and they embrace each other. In that embrace his father says, "you're my only son and I'm not going to lose you to no gun violence, I love you, man!"

We are called to dispense the love of God as we stand in the gap and declare that We are not going to lose another brother or sister to gun violence, Why? Because, I love you! Because we love our neighbors of all races, classes, sexual orientations, economic status, because we love, care and are committed to change. Committed to change the current state of violence in the world to a shift of focus on the love of God and love of neighbor. Trusting in the lord with all our hearts and leaning not unto our own understanding in all our ways acknowledging God as God directs our paths. We seeking after justice as God calls us to be peacemakers in a chaotic and violent world. In doing these things we can begin to dispense the love of God to a broken world.

We must be intentional, structured, and mindful in our approach to bring about change in our world. Intentionally stepping into the very fabric of this complex issue to see what we can do to support change, peace, resolution and hope. We can take part in signing petitions, make phone calls to federal and state representative encouraging them to reinstate the assault weapons ban that expired in 2004, encouraging them to require universal background checks when purchasing any firearm, make gun trafficking a federal crime and require all guns to be registered with the state and insured by their owners, just as we do automobiles. We must find a way to become involved in this movement toward peace.

Participation in this national gun violence Sabbath is one way we can speak out, but we can't stop there. We must be intentional, structured and mindful in ways to dispense the love of God throughout our social fabric and stand up for gun violence. Let's come together as the body of believers to speak out as a collective voice and dispense the

love of God as we fight for our children's safety in schools, safety in our local neighborhoods, safety in our churches, synagogues, mosaic, temples, homes, streets...our world. Where can you take part? Where will you take part? How will you love God and neighbor? How will you dispense the love of God to all and take a stand, seeking after justice and peace?

The 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) adopted the resolution, [Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call](#) which compels us to lead the way in the broader faith community to the creation of a broad-based social movement to prevent gun violence, beginning with and led by an opening to the Holy Spirit, and drawing its strength from the grassroots, especially people in the pews. Congregations and other faith communities can take practical direct action on local levels while generating critical change in cultural norms and attitudes toward guns, their possession, distribution, and use. In this way our church, the faith community, and the movement they can lead, will heed God's call to protect more of God's children.

Calvin's commentary on the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not kill," shows his theological perspective on the ordering of society that is based on the value of each human life as loved and redeemed by God and therefore in need of protection.

*The purpose of this commandment is, that since the Lord has bound the whole human race by a kind of unity, the safety of all ought to be considered as entrusted to each. In general, therefore, all violence and injustice, and every kind of harm from which our neighbor's body suffers, is prohibited. Accordingly, we are required faithfully to do*

*what in us lies to defend the life of our neighbor, to promote whatever tends to his tranquility, to be vigilant in warding off harm, and when danger comes, to assist in removing it.*

Jesus commands us to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength- with all of our being and resources and love our neighbor as ourselves.

So what might this movement look like?

Story: News reports earlier this week tells of a story about a 12-year-old New Zealand boy who almost lost his life. He was swept out to sea by rough waters, dragged nearly 500 feet along the beach and fought eight long minutes for air against the pounding surf. A police officer was the first one into the water to attempt to rescue the boy, but he had a difficult time holding on to him. The waves were so powerful that the police officer was now in danger with the boy. Another police officer instructed others in the area to form a human chain from the shoreline into the water to bring them to safety. There were more than a dozen people holding hands from the beach into the whitecap waves to bring the two to back to the shore to safety.

The 12 year old said- "I'd love to thank them so much for what they did. They saved my life. If it wasn't for them I'd be dead,"

In our world gun violence is drowning our brothers and sisters, we must come together as the body of Christ to create a movement....we join together to form a human chain

and go out to dispense the love of God, igniting this movement, seeking to establish peace and working to stop the many senseless deaths due to gun violence. Work to save lives. Love your neighbors. And care for all children of God.

In this season of Lent we are reminded that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. Lovingly Jesus served God and humanity. Lovingly Jesus gave tirelessly in service to us all. On the cross Jesus gave his life so that we might have life and life more abundantly. God also calls us to a life of service, loving service to God and humanity. The issue of gun violence is not going to be solved quickly, but we can't sit silently and do nothing. We must join in this movement to of change. Today I ask, how will you respond to God's call to service? How will you dispense the love of God to all seeking after justice and peace.

Song: Guide my feet while I run this race....guide my feet while I run this race I don't want to run this race in vain.

Guide my tongue- Speak to me- Hold my hand