

- Properly, when I stand to preach it is my intention to shine a light on the wisdom of Jesus. I proclaim to you that Jesus is the great teacher and we the disciples are invited to sit at his feet and listen. For the last few weeks we have witnessed Jesus engage with the Pharisees and the Sadducees in philosophical and theological debate. What strikes me today, and I feel odd saying it, is that Jesus comes across to me as a bit of a know it all. When I read that Jesus silenced the Sadducees that makes me uneasy. It sounds mean. I don't like to think of Jesus as mean. The others can be mean all they want but I don't want the Lord Jesus to be mean.
- Here is another thing about mean Jesus. He is a young man and properly he ought to show respect to his elders. In the world of debate you are expected to ask challenging questions. You don't have to stab them with your answer. I remember from my school days that the know it all guy didn't have many friends. One of the reasons the people loved to listen to Jesus was because he put the Pharisees and Sadducees in their place. If we listened to our mothers we are supposed to walk away.
- Jesus stands his ground and he dismisses all comers. Nobody can land a punch on him. Because Jesus comes across as the wise guy I am not surprised that they waited for their chance to take him down. On the surface this looked like a debate but the truth is that it was more like a fist fight. The great debate today is about how to answer the question, "which commandment of the Law is the greatest one." There were plenty of Laws to choose from. In fact there were 613 laws to consider. Some laws were considered to be more important than others. The question was, which ones.
- Jesus gives what we might call a classical answer. His answer could not be disagreed with. We must love God and we must love our neighbor as ourselves. That sounds easy and straightforward, but the truth is that it is hard. We are pretty good at loving God but we are not wonderful when it comes to loving our neighbor. The first lesson from Exodus reminds us. Consider the plight of the poor and vulnerable. And, God warns us, "Don't you dare treat them badly."
- That kind of plays into our modern debate about accepting migrants and refugees into our country. We grudgingly accept some of them, but we would prefer to send them all back to where they came from. The thing is we are sending them back to Isis, to Al Qaeda, to famine and war. These people are barely alive. Their families have been destroyed. They just want to find a place that will allow them to bring up their children in safety. They just want to find a place where they can live a happy peaceful life and enjoy their family. We wish them all the best but, we say, you can't live here. This is our safe place. We don't want to share that with anyone. If that is our response then God is not pleased with us.

- So, which is the greatest commandment? What is the right thing to do? How do we know what to do? There must be a thousand answers. I found one answer that speaks to me. Which is the greatest commandment? The one that brings me peace of mind. How do I know what the right thing to do is? When peace of mind comes.
- I want to finish with a quote from a fridge magnet: Dear Christians, the way we love and treat other people carries a lot more weight than how much scripture we can quote.