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Grace Episcopal Church

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Luke 10: 25-28

⁵ An expert (a Lawyer NRSV) in the law stood up to test Jesus.^[1]“Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷ He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

Good afternoon friends, I am Sarah Spurlock Biggs, your summer seminarian—and I am so grateful to be with you.

Today we celebrate the life and ministry of Joseph Butler. Joseph Butler was a bishop and theologian who challenged the theology of Deism—a popular understanding of God in the 17th and 18th centuries—Deism imagined God as a Divine Clockmaker—as creator of our world—but not as active sustainer... As creator of every living creature—but not involved in our daily lives. Joseph Butler’s work challenged this thinking and instead envisioned God as intimately linked to us in our **conscience**. In his writings, Butler claimed our **conscience** to be our “inborn sense of right and wrong” and our “inner light received from God.” This imagery is quite a contrast to Deism—describing instead God’s intimate relationship with **each** of us...

Our Old Testament lectionary readings today support Joseph Butler’s theology in pointing to the ways we seek temporal wisdom and truth from this world—and often deny the peace available to us when we allow God to interact with us in our daily lives and lead us from within...

Our Gospel reading is another example of how Jesus interacts with us. When asked “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus, points the lawyer (likely a Pharisee and expert in the law) to what he *already* knows.

Jesus asks him to *remember* the commandment from Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The Shema—the Greatest Commandment.

To LOVE.

To love God, to love our neighbor, and to love ourselves.

Jesus pulled directly from their shared faith and sacred texts—yet his teachings were seen as radical to many, especially those in power.

Like Jesus in the first century, we are living during a time of great turmoil and unrest. And

yet—God in Christ Jesus calls us today— *commands* US today—to love.

It is not easy to love *anyone* well when consumed by things NOT of GOD.

Those things that distract us from being who God calls us to be— things like pain, sickness, shame, anxiety, lust for power, and that ever persistent drive to obtain more and more earthly possessions...

These things are not what God wants for anyone in this world—and these things often affect our ability to love.

Sometimes, it is not easy to love ourselves—when loving ourselves means being kind to ourselves and **accepting** ourselves – just - as - we are...

And, It is not easy to love our neighbors when we see in them things we fear...

Even loving God is challenged when we are consumed by our fears, and wants, and when we look **only** at the sorrows of this world...

God knows this commandment is hard to uphold. But **Jesus** came to show us a different way to be in this world.

On his journey to the cross—Jesus went about lovingly removing obstacles that kept those he encountered from being wholly who God created them to be—obstacles that kept them from loving God, loving themselves, and loving their neighbors.

And friends, God is with us now—loving and sustaining us, and paving a way for us, through all the commotion of **this** life.

So, today, as we pray for healing for all those on our hearts and minds, let us remember that by the power of the Holy Spirit it is our loving God who lives in each of us, strengthens us to do the work we are called to do, sustains us in this life, and loves us without ceasing.