Menno Mennonite Church | Yes, I KNOW | Emily Toews
10/25/2026 | Matthew 22:34-40

There is something about being told how to do something we already know how to do that gets under our skin. We don't like being corrected when we are already trying our best, and we certainly don't appreciate being instructed by someone who seems to know less than we do.

Sometimes we have good reason to be frustrated, but sometimes our reaction has more to do with our pride than with the advice itself. We want to say, "I know!"

And sometimes we do know. We know how to make toast. We know how to fold a fitted sheet—or at least we have developed our own system. And if we have been backing up a trailer for thirty years, we might have a thing or two to teach the person who just learned how to attach one.

But what happens when that same attitude follows us into our relationships with other people? What happens when we assume that because we already know something, we have nothing left to learn? What happens when our need to be right gets in the way of our ability to listen, or when our certainty about what someone else should do keeps us from noticing what that person actually needs?

Matthew tells us that the question, "which commandment in the law is the greatest." is intended to test Jesus. Jesus has been challenged repeatedly by religious leaders who want to question his authority and catch him in his words. This is another opportunity for them to see whether they can get the better of him.

Jesus answers by bringing together two commandments from the Scriptures his listeners already know. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." And, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Then Jesus says that all the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments.

Jesus does not dismiss the Law or suggest that the commandments no longer matter. Instead, he identifies the foundation that holds them together. Love of God and love of neighbor are inseparable. Everything else must be understood in light of these two commandments.

Jesus does not give us the option of keeping our love for God safely separated from our relationships with other people. If we love God, then the way we treat our neighbors matters. Notice that Jesus does not say that we are to love only the neighbors who are easy to love, the ones who share our values, or the ones who treat us exactly as we think they should. He simply says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Leviticus gives us a picture of what this love looks like. The scripture passage I read earlier begins with God saying to Moses, "Say to the whole community of Israelites: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." When we hear the word holy, we might think about something sacred, separate, or especially religious. We might imagine holiness as a matter of following rules, avoiding certain behaviors, or being more righteous than the people around us. But God instructs the people to judge fairly, refuse to slander others, not stand idly by when another person's life is threatened, address wrongdoing honestly, and refuse to take vengeance or hold grudges. And then comes the command to love their neighbors as themselves.

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God connects holiness with the ordinary business of living together. In other words, holiness is not about proving that we are better than our neighbors. It is about reflecting the character of God in the way we live.

We become a people shaped by God as we learn to live in ways that reflect God's character.

One of the things that makes love difficult is that we often approach our relationships with a pretty clear idea of what other people ought to be doing. We know how things should be done. We know what someone should have said. Sometimes we are right. But being right about something does not automatically mean that we are responding in a loving way.

We are so busy preparing our responses in life that we barely listen to what the other person is saying. We hear a disagreement and immediately begin building our argument. We assume that we understand someone's motives before we have taken the time to ask. We correct someone without considering whether correction is what they need at that moment.

That is where humility becomes essential to love. Humility does not mean pretending that we have no knowledge, no gifts, or no convictions. It does not mean that we must agree with everyone or remain silent when something is wrong. Humility means recognizing that we are not the center of everything, that our perspective is limited, and that another person has worth even when we disagree with them. It means being willing to ask, "What might I be missing?" It means recognizing that we can be correct about the facts and still be unkind in the way we speak.

Humility makes room for us to listen without surrendering our convictions, to speak honestly without humiliating someone, and to delight in the achievement of others. And this is not merely good advice for getting along with people. It is part of our response to Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

If I want to be heard, then I must be willing to listen. If I want others to treat me with patience, then I must practice patience with them. If I want people to recognize that my mistakes do not define my entire life, then I must remember that the same is true of others'.

Of course, we need to be careful here. Humility and love do not mean that we should simply ignore wrongdoing, avoid difficult conversations, or pretend that everyone is treating everyone else well. Leviticus is quite clear about this. God tells the people not to hate their neighbors in their hearts, but to address wrongdoing honestly. The passage also warns against partiality, slander, and revenge.

This is a picture of love that takes truth and justice seriously. Sometimes loving a neighbor means offering help. Sometimes it means standing up for someone who is being treated unfairly. Sometimes it means speaking honestly about harm that has occurred, even when that conversation is uncomfortable.

But even when we cannot make everything right, we can refuse to let hatred and revenge determine who we become.

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If we understand the commandment to love our neighbors but use our knowledge to look down on them, something has gone wrong. If our convictions make us less willing to listen, less compassionate toward those who struggle, or more interested in proving ourselves right than in seeking another person's good, then we need to return to Jesus and listen again.

Jesus challenges us to look beyond a commandment we already know. He invites us to go deeper. Not simply to know who the Messiah is, but to be willing to recognize what God is doing through him. Not simply to know that we should love our neighbors, but to let that love reshape how we think, speak, disagree, forgive, and live together.

And this is where humility becomes essential. Humility allows us to admit that we may not yet understand everything we need to understand about God, our neighbors, or ourselves. It keeps us teachable. It makes room for the possibility that Jesus may challenge our expectations, disturb our comfortable assumptions, and show us a more faithful way to live.

Yes, we know the Scriptures. And we still need to listen to Jesus. Yes, we know the commandment to love. And we still need to learn how to live it. Because the goal is not simply to have the right answer. The goal is to become people whose lives reflect the love of the One we follow.

So what does this look like in our congregation? It begins with recognizing that we are not a gathering of people who have mastered the art of loving one another. We are a community of people who are still learning how to follow Jesus together.

We bring different experiences, gifts, opinions, and expectations. Sometimes those differences enrich us, and sometimes they frustrate us. We will not always agree about the best way to do something, and we will not always understand one another immediately but we can choose how we respond.

We can ask questions before making assumptions. We can listen to understand rather than simply waiting for our turn to speak. We can acknowledge another person's concern without pretending that we share every opinion. We can be willing to apologize when we have spoken carelessly or failed to consider how our actions affected someone else. We can refuse to participate in gossip, address problems honestly, and resist the temptation to make a disagreement into a judgment about someone's entire character. We can remember that the person who frustrates us is still our neighbor, and that the person who disagrees with us is still someone whom God loves. And we can extend this love beyond our church doors, into the parking lot, into our homes, workplaces, farms, schools, and communities. The command to love our neighbors does not stop at the church door.

We know the commandment to love God and love our neighbors. And we are still learning how to live it.
We know that God calls us to holiness. And we are still learning that holiness is not about being better than other people, but about reflecting God's character through our relationships and our choices.
We know that Jesus calls us to follow him. And we are still learning how to follow him with humility, courage, honesty, and compassion. This is not a failure of faith. It is part of being disciples.

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The good news is that God continues to work in us, forming us into people who increasingly reflect the love we have received. We do not have to manufacture that love on our own, but we do have to remain open to the ways God is calling us to practice it.

So perhaps the question we carry with us this week is “Am I loving my neighbor?” Am I willing to listen when someone sees things differently? Am I willing to examine the pride or resentment that keeps me from seeking another person's good? Am I willing to speak honestly when something needs to change, while remembering that the person I am speaking to is also loved by God?

We may know the answers to these questions. We may have heard these commandments hundreds of times. But Jesus keeps bringing us back to them because they are the foundation of faithful living.

Love God. Love your neighbor. Yes… we KNOW! We’re already doing that!

Yes, we know what love requires. And we must keep practicing it.

Yes, we want to be faithful. And we must allow God to keep shaping us.

May we be a people who are humble enough to keep learning, courageous enough to speak the truth, and loving enough to seek the good of our neighbors, even when it is difficult.

May we be a congregation in which God's holiness is visible not because we believe we are better than others, but because we are learning to treat one another with the justice, mercy, and love of God.

And may the Holy Spirit continue to teach us what it means to follow Jesus, until the love we profess with our mouths becomes the love we practice with our lives.
Amen.