

## Proper 25

## Breaking Open The Word

Exodus 22:21-27

Psalm 1

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Matthew 22:34-46

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.+ *Amen.*

*'The LORD said to my Lord,  
"Sit on my right hand,  
until I put your enemies under your feet."'*

I don't know about you, but I get very confused by scripture like this. And frustrated; this is our Lord trying to tell us something! We want very much to understand every morsel of his teachings, and our Gospels are all we have to go by – the earliest written accounts we know of, written by scribes who had the foresight to put pen to papyrus, and record the stories – The Story - that had been transmitted only orally until then. It is in wrestling with scripture passages like this one that I am very grateful for the possibility of turning to the original languages, which shed light on the meaning of messages as perplexing as this one.

I know, you're probably inwardly groaning, "Here she goes again with the Greek and the Hebrew..." – just be glad you're not around the office when I'm transcribing. Just ask George or Dr. Sean – they'll walk in at just the moment I've uncovered some really interesting thing, and they won't be able to back out gracefully till I've talked their ear off. I know you are as hungry as I am to understand what our Lord is saying to us today, so let me break open for you the Word as best I can.

Our scripture begins with Jesus facing up to the Pharisees. They have just witnessed Jesus silencing the Saducees – in fact, the translation tells us that Jesus didn't simply silence them, he "*muzzled*" them. That's a powerful image! Jesus *muzzled* the Saducees, that religious group known as "the righteous," the ones respected as the keepers of the divine authority of the written law. Now here he is, facing up to the opposite group of religious authorities known as the Pharisees. These leaders were bitter enemies of Jesus. He had forcefully rebuked them for their love of hollow religious ceremony and public piety for the sake of distinction and political influence. These Pharisees are the ones most threatened by Jesus; these are the ones plotting a way to trap this troublemaking and popular prophet without jeopardizing their own power among the people. It is one of these Pharisees that interrogates Jesus on Mosaic law. "Which commandment is the greatest?" he asks. And Jesus answers with a poignancy which reveals itself only in the Greek. He answers that, of course, the greatest commandment is that we are to love our God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind, and that the second commandment is like unto it: we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. And then he says, "*on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*" Of all the words he could have chosen to express "hang," he used the word "*kremanoomee*," the same word used to

describe “one hung on a cross.” Not only did all the law and all the teachings of the prophets of the Torah hang on these commandments; our Lord himself would give his life, out of love, to hang on those same two commandments of his love for God, and for us.

Now, there’s a very interesting thing about what he said regarding loving our neighbor. What the ancient languages tell us is that he used the word “*plesion*,” which means not neighbor, but means “the other,” specifically referring to other races and religions. We are to love *the other* as ourselves. This is radically different from what we think of as our “neighbor,” isn’t it. Jesus is telling us we are to love those who are radically different from us – different in race and religion – as ourselves. Jesus is teaching us that we are to love God, and we are to love the other, and that this is what everything hangs on. It wouldn’t be long before he would teach us that this wide a scope, this wide a reach, was worth it to him to hang on the cross, for the sake of all “the others.”

But back to this day in the face-off with the Pharisees. He dispatches that first question without hesitation, and then turns the interrogation on them. “*What do you think*,” he asks, “*of the Messiah?*” In the Greek he asks, “*What do you think of the Christos?*” meaning “the anointed”) – *whose son is he?*” And here is where the languages really come to our rescue. “*They said to him, “David.”*” (not “son of”). The Pharisees say they believe that the Christos is the son of David – David, youngest son of Jesse; David, the second King of Israel; David, the writer of the the Psalms. So Jesus counters this by quoting from David’s Psalm 110, asking, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls the Christos “Lord”, saying,

*“The Lord said to my Lord  
‘Sit on my right hand’  
until I put your enemies under your feet”*

And there it is again, this puzzle of what sounds like one rather strange Lord talking to himself about someone sitting on his right hand... But here we go back to the Hebrew, the language of David the Psalmist, and find that the first “LORD” is in full capital letters, indicating *YHWH*, the Great I Am, God Almighty. The second “Lord” is the word “*awdone*” meaning “*master*.” So it is clear that we have Almighty God speaking to David’s master. This is a conversation between God and Christ, clarifying the place of Christ as being the son of God, seated *beside* (not *on*, thank goodness) the right hand of God until the time of his second coming. David the Psalmist understood that the Messiah, the Christos, the son of God, was his personal master, certainly not his son. And in spelling this out for the Pharisees, he points to the truth of who he is. Jesus has chosen this careful and educated approach, drawing on his own scholarship and understanding of Holy Scripture, to spell it out for these religious showmen, that he was the Messiah, the Christos, the Son of God; that he was in fact master and Lord of the great King David. Jesus the Christ made his identity clear, and from that moment on the religious authorities ceased all interrogation: “*Noone was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.*”

Jesus in our scripture today is all done with subtlety. His message has turned from gentle persuasion to dangerous clarity: he has thrown down the gauntlet. He has stumped the Saducees, and now has bested the Pharisees. He has shown his hand, revealing not only who he is, but who they are; he has literally put the Pharisees in their place – and willingly put himself in position to very soon be hung on a cross, for the sake of his love and his obedience to the two pivotal commandments.

Jesus, the Christos, the Christ, gave us the Word: to be broken open, to be savored and chewed and taken in, for our nourishment. Jesus, the Christos, Jesus the Christ, *was* the Word, broken for us, broken for “we who are the other.” In the sacraments of Word, and Bread, and Wine, let us, with thanks, try to take in the inconceivable: that our Lord, the very Son of God, said Yes to incarnation; that our Lord said Yes to emptying himself of his divinity, in order to say Yes to full humanity; that our Lord said Yes to being hung on a cross, for us and for the other; that our Lord said Yes to resurrection, Yes to ascension, and Yes to the judgment seat at the right hand of YHWH, the Great I Am, until that day when the duality of friend versus enemy, us versus other, is vanquished under his feet, and he comes again.

Amen. Alleluia!

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