

BLESSINGS ALWAYS

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Association Minister Message

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AUTHORITY. Being a devout Jew, Jesus was well-versed in the traditions, commandments, and rabbinic debates about how to live a faithful life as God's spokesperson. Jesus was constantly challenged about His *AUTHORITY*. On one occasion, a scribe (religious legal expert), recognizing Jesus' "*wisdom/AUTHORITY,*" was seeking to understand Jesus' ethical teachings of the faith. He asks, "*Which commandment is the first of all?*" Jesus responded by reciting the "*Shema,*" the basic "*creed/testimony*" of the Jewish faith, "*Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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.*" (Mark 12:29-30, repeat of Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Faithful Jews spoke this first thing in the morning and last thing before sleeping, reminding them there is only one God as opposed to religions around them of many gods. By repeating and believing these words, God was the *AUTHORITY* over their lives.

There are 613 commandments that the faithful were to follow: 365 "*Thou shall nots,*" and 248 "*Thou shalls.*" Jesus succinctly summarized the law with the *Shema* and "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" (Mark 12:31, repeat of Leviticus 19:18). These two laws are the fundamental foundations of faith that connect God, neighbors, and us together to live in harmony and love. Interpreting the law legalistically makes it so rigid and inflexible that it cannot act in compassionate and caring ways. When law focus on its intention, it is relationship building, generous, kind, and inclusive in affirming God's creative diversity in each other and the world.

Jesus' message invites us to seek the Realm of God as *servant-disciples* in ways of love for God, others, and ourselves. Love transforms us and the world when visions become actions of peace, justice, and goodwill. We pray down God's Holy Spirit on us so that we will be given God's *AUTHORITY* as healers of evil and broken relationships. Conviction of faith in God leads to love for, with, and to others. "*May our dreams prove rich with promise, each endeavor, well begun; Great Creator, give us guidance till our goals and yours are one.*" (Catherine Cameron, NCH, 556.)
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