

## Friday in the Third Week of Lent

March 12, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Hosea 14:1–9; Psalm 81:8–16\*; Mark 1:15; Mark 12:28–34*

Today’s gospel lesson is one of my favorites. It’s Tuesday, the second day after Jesus entered Jerusalem. As he enters the temple, he clears out the merchants and moneychangers. People are there. Religious leaders are there, including the Pharisees who have been planning to “destroy” him since he healed a withered man’s hand on the sabbath as his ministry began.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus’ day in the temple begins with the religious leaders challenging his teaching and authority.<sup>2</sup> Jesus responds to them and follows with the Parable of the Vineyard. Then there are words about paying taxes and questions about resurrection, that conclude with Jesus saying, “God said to Moses, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ He is not God of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 3:1–6.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 11:27–33.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 12:26b–27.

Then, today's lesson. A scribe who heard Jesus' teaching asks him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" He hears Jesus speak words about God and neighbor. He says to Jesus, "You are right, Teacher." Jesus sees his faith and says to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."<sup>4</sup>

In Matthew, Jesus is also in the temple in Jerusalem. When a Pharisee who is a lawyer asks, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus responds about God and neighbor. Matthew's Jesus adds, "On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."<sup>5</sup> This picks up on a theme from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said, "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them."<sup>6</sup>

Luke uses Mark's story to tell another story. Luke, like Matthew, makes the scribe a lawyer. He asks Jesus, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds with a question for him, "What is written in the law?" He speaks correctly of the duty to God and neighbor. Jesus replies, "You have answered right; do

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 12:34.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 22:34–40.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 5:17.

this, and you will live.” He then asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Then Jesus asks, “Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed mercy on him.” And Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”<sup>7</sup>

In their commentary on Mark, John Donahue and the late Daniel Harrington, both New Testament scholars and Jesuit priests, they note “the friendly attitude displayed by the scribe and Jesus’ affirmation of him as ‘not far from the kingdom of God.’” The evangelist continued, “And after that no one dared to ask him any question.”<sup>8</sup>

In his commentary on Mark, Joel Marcus notes the importance of the issue of Jesus’ authority as he teaches in the temple.<sup>9</sup> Mark never uses the later image from John’s gospel of Jesus as the Word made flesh, but in the person of Jesus, God’s dominion and power are present. No one is falling on his face to worship

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 10:25–37.

<sup>8</sup> Mark 12:34b.

<sup>9</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, Anchor Bible 27A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 845.

him, but no one is daring to speak in the presence of his words.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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