

April 5, 2017. Lenten Evening Worship at Advent Lutheran Church in Cedarburg. 7:00PM. Holden Village Service. Mark 12:28-34. The Greatest commandment.

A reading from the Jewish religious site called **Chabat.org**:

“One famous account in the Talmud (Shabbat 31a) tells about a gentile who wanted to convert to Judaism. This happened not infrequently, and this individual stated that he would accept Judaism only if a rabbi would teach him the entire Torah while he, the prospective convert, stood on one foot.

First, he went to Shammai, who, insulted by this ridiculous request, threw him out of the house. The man did not give up and went to Hillel. This gentle sage accepted the challenge, and said:

"What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation of this--go and study it!"

I have always enjoyed that story about the great **Rabbi Hillel** who could distil the entire **5 books of Moses** to what is ostensibly the **Golden Rule** found in all major world religions.

I feel the same way about what we Christians call the **Greatest Commandment**.

“You must love God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength; and you must love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

Notice that Jesus drives the point home with the next verse that can only be interpreted as diminishing the role of the very heart of Jewish religion and ideology;

“It is more important to obey these two commandments than to offer on the altar animals and other sacrifices to God.”

When Jesus says, we are to love God with heart, mind and strength, he does not mean love as an emotion, he means with your **whole being! If he meant love as we use the word he would have used the Greek Philiis** rather than the word he **does use, Agape, divine love!**

In that same spirit, I received an e-mail message from the group called Jewish voice for peace:

Dear Friend,

Wow. JVP's National Member Meeting concluded Sunday night with one of the most moving political experiences of either of our lives.

"This conference has been about much more than naming oppressions. We danced (some of us), sang, laughed, wept, mourned, strategized, debated and disagreed and most importantly we dreamed. We dreamed of a beloved community" - Nyle Fort

The next chapter of Jewish social justice tradition must be one where no one is left behind. We left Chicago knowing JVP is going to write that future with joy, hard work, and humility.

Our gathering was massively enriched by hundreds of Muslim, Christian, and secular Palestinians. Dozens of rabbis worked alongside people entering a Jewish community for the first time. Veterans of the Civil Rights movement joined forces with millennials, Democratic Party activists with socialists and anarchists (not to mention a contingent of principled conservatives).

Artists and youth organizers, academics and health care workers, JVP chapter leaders and the leadership of over 50 allied organizations. People from 35 states and 5 countries. We opened our hearts and minds to the genuine power differences within Jewish communities and the movement as a whole - and nudged them toward a healthier place.

I believe that what I just read is what Jesus envisioned for **humankind**, knowing as he certainly did that religion often **fosters and feeds** what we have learned to call **Toxic Certainty**. If there actually is an **Original Sin** it has nothing to do with eating forbidden fruit – it is **thinking that you are God, and behaving that way!**

This evening we drive the nail of arrogance and self-righteousness, two qualities that are hardly scare in all religions!

