

*Two Pegs*  
Matthew 22:34-46

There have been many improvements in the design and layout of the modern home. But there is one space that has been removed from the layout of most contemporary homes. We have foyers and entry ways which can be very welcoming and this is good. But one of the spaces I missed in the newer homes we lived in while in the mid-west was the good old-fashion what we call here in New England, a mud room.

Mud rooms are necessary spaces when you live on farms or you have a driveway that is gravel. It is a place to take off your muddy boots, jacket, rain gear, running shoes, gloves, mittens, scarfs, for the dog to shake off (you know he's not going to do it outside!) etc. In most mudrooms there will be a bench of some sort, a boot jack, and and in every mud room, worth its name, there will be a line of Shaker pegs along one or more walls. We had a mudroom with pegs on two walls at different heights. One for adults the other for children. And we keep on these pegs depending of the season, different jackets, hats scarfs, so forth, which we will grab and take with us as we go out the door.

Okay, now with this image in mind, let's turn to the Gospel passage from Matthew. This reading covers two short accounts from Jesus' ministry. I would like to focus on the first selection.

Verses 34-40 comprise what for Jesus was his definition of true religion, or we might say what was for Jesus his "Way." He was asked (albeit to trick him.) what was central to his belief, his summary of the law and the prophets – the law being that which spells out what God requires in written form, the prophets taking the law and speaking it into particular situations.

First, Jesus says, there is the command to love God with everything we have. Now, if this is considered simply as a human requirement, it can lead to frustration, because if we are honest we have times when we may not feel at all loving, even toward God! But the heart of spirituality is mutuality, that is, love for God is like faith, and faith is a gift from God. We find that God gives us the love we have for God, and this is the gift of the Holy Spirit which in turn bears witness in our hearts that we belong to God, through Jesus Christ.

For me this love for God is expressed not only in my devotion to God through the worship of God but also in the way I approach all of God's creation. I express my love for God not only through the prayers and songs in a service of worship but also in my service to the created world around me.

A person who you love deeply gives you a gift. Would you abuse that gift, mistreat it, break it, destroy it? How can I say I love God and then exploit and abuse God's creation?

And the second commandment is like the first, Jesus says, "*You shall love you neighbor as yourself.*" While it might be possible for a person to force themselves, almost as it were, through gritted teeth, into loving their neighbor, by-in-large we claim that no one can command us to feel something we just don't feel.

But Jesus here is talking about a love that is not a matter of "warm feelings" a "racing of the heart" but rather a stubborn, unwavering commitment to another regardless of how we may "feel" about them at the time. I know that there are times when I'm not very likable! But Donna amazingly still loves me! (Or at least so she tells me!)

Rev. Kate Matthews, who writes a weekly Bible Study through our United Church of Christ denomination spoke of this commitment to **do** love, to show love, as being a

“setting of the heart.” A decision to act that then affects how we feel, no matter our mood or inclination at the time. Think of it as a setting on your dryer or washing machine. This is how we will choose to treat others.

I’ve found that when I decide to set my heart in a certain direction and I do things that fulfill that commitment; my feelings will often follow the actions. Many of the “laws” of God, like giving, observing a Sabbath and loving, rather than being punitive or negative, I believe are God’s way of getting us to do what we *need* to do, *what is good for us*.

Back to the mud room!

Sometimes Eugene Peterson's translation of the Bible called “The Message” can create an image that brings scripture alive. This is how a portion of this Matthew passage reads in The Message:

*Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.’ This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ These two commandments are **pegs**; everything in God’s Law and the Prophets **hangs from them.**”*

Love of God and Love of neighbor,

two pegs on which hang spiritual attitudes that we need to take with us when we go out into the world.

Scarfs to keep our hearts warm.

Hats to keep good thoughts in our minds.

Sturdy boots that will take you wherever God may call you.

Gloves, so that we can be the hands of God doing the work of love and an extra pair or two for it will require effort!

Perhaps even a strong vest or jacket that will protect your soul from all the stinging criticism, for even doing good, doing the right thing will bring criticism from some quarters. (Jesus warned us about this in his Sermon on the Mount.)

So, even though this is a Stewardship Sunday, rather than asking “what’s in your wallet? I’m challenging you to take a look at, “What’s hanging in your mud room?”

What do you take with you every time you step out into the world?

What spiritual attributes, "gifts of the spirit" do you put on?

Now realizing that all metaphors are just this, metaphors, symbols and not the real thing, there is one especially important place where my mudroom peg metaphor breaks down, and that is this:

We should not take off these spiritual attitudes and hang them up when we reenter our homes, for they are just as needed in our homes as they are in the world!