

## **“A Deacon’s Biggest Challenge”**

Matthew 22: 34-40

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Ordination of Laura Hendrix and Communion

This morning our attention is drawn to the office of deacon as we ordain Laura Hendrix. I am pleased our congregation has asked Laura to serve in this capacity and am grateful for her willingness to work alongside our other fine deacons. Since Laura has never been ordained, we single her out today to affirm her and to ask God’s blessings upon her.

**What is a deacon’s biggest challenge?** I pondered this question last week as I thought about this service.

While deacons have many responsibilities that help us to be the presence of Christ in this community, I believe one challenge stands out among the others. For me, a deacon’s greatest challenge is to be a good role model.

Jesus was approached by a Pharisee one day and asked what he thought was the greatest commandment in the Law. Immediately, he replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two.” (Matthew 22:34-40)

**If these are the greatest commandments, and they are, then church leaders have no greater challenge than showing the world how this is done, just as Jesus did.** How does a person do this? What does it mean to love God, love others and love ourselves?

We love God by taking our faith seriously. We make a sincere and life-long commitment to reflect the heart and nature of God in all we say and do.

Often I tell people who are seeking a better understanding of God to study the words of Jesus and to examine his life. If you want to know who God is, look to Jesus. If you want to know what God thinks, listen to Jesus. If you want to know what God would do in a particular situation, look at what Jesus did in similar situations.

Just as all of us need Jesus to enlighten and guide us, so our friends and neighbors need us to be the presence of Christ in their lives. They should see Jesus in us by the way we determine our values, arrange our priorities, treat other people and handle problems, trials,

temptations and disappointments. When they do, not only are they more informed, but so is God. By observing our lifestyles, God knows of our love for him and loyalty to him.

**Why is it so important we love others?** Why did Jesus include the second commandment in his answer to the Pharisees' question?

It is impossible to love God without loving those around us, although some of the religious leaders of his day tried. By loving and serving others, God, again, knows of our love for him.

How do we love people as Jesus mentioned in the conversation with the Pharisee? We live by the Golden Rule.

We treat every person with dignity and respect, including those who don't treat us this way.

In all our dealings with others, we are honest, trustworthy, reliable, dependable, fair, compassionate, kind, unselfish and humble.

We help those around us to achieve their potential and to overcome their struggles.

When necessary, we become their advocate, using our influence to confront and change the conditions that contribute to their problems and make their lives miserable.

**But it is not just others we are to love; we are to love ourselves, too.** Deacons must model self-care by living a balanced life that addresses physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs. Deacons need to demonstrate what healthy pride looks like, the kind that comes from following in Jesus' footsteps.

Laura, I know this is a big challenge, and to be honest with you, you cannot live up to it without encouragement and help. Let me assure you the same God who helped Jesus to be faithful all the way to the cross will help you, too. Draw near him every day and ask for the wisdom, understanding, guidance and power you need.

This dedicated group of deacons you will serve alongside will also support you on this faith journey. Listen carefully to the words they will whisper in your ear as they participate in the next part of our service, the laying on of hands.