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Gospel of Matthew 22:34-40

This week I spent some time thinking about how to connect Scripture, Scouting, and the Superbowl. I did identify some striking similarities. Before I go there, I need to share something foundational.

The Scripture passage we just heard is one of the most well known. Jesus tells the religious leaders of the time that the single most important rules for life are to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. He's lifting up what he calls the two most important commandments from the Hebrew Bible (what we call the Old Testament) and linking them together. He says everything else rests on this.

The first part, "love God" comes from the Book of Deuteronomy (6:5) and the second part, "love your neighbor" comes from the Book of Leviticus (19:17-18). You probably know that the Bible wasn't originally written in English. Sometimes it's helpful to sift through ancient Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew. The Hebrew for the second part of the passage actually reads differently than you might think. Young's Literal Translation of the Bible says that it's (not 'love your neighbor' but) 'Thou shalt love *to* your neighbor.'

Dr. Chaim Bentorah, an expert in Hebrew, and a former professor of classical Hebrew and Old Testament says that, "The preposition "to" in this case means that it would read, "Do (acts of) love to your neighbor." My understanding of that, in today's terms, would be, "treat your neighbor with kindness and respect, be honest and helpful, and be brave and strong in your interactions."

If that resonates with you, it could be because it sounds a bit like the First Parish Church's Vision statement (look on the front of your program!)...and the Scout Law which says that a scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent. It's evident that First Parish, football, and following Scout Law all have relational aspects. Parishioners, Pats fans, and people who are scouts all interact with others. None exist solely for their own benefit. *So...what else do we have in common?*

Well, there are the uniforms. Football players have uniforms. (Clearly, fans do, too. Yesterday, at Hannaford, did you see people with their Pats gear?!) Scouts have uniforms. And Christians have the opportunity to wear a uniform and I'm not talking about a robe or stole or even a cross. I'll come back to this.

We all work for the greater good. In football, each player does his part to help the team win, but it's about more than just the game. Teams have outreach to their communities. The Patriots have a charitable foundation and just this week, players families' and friends volunteered in Atlanta at a shelter for homeless men, women, and children. For many years, the Scout Slogan has been, "Do a good turn daily". Scouting is about so much more than doing something to get a merit badge or going on a campout. It's about living the slogan and doing good in the world. In Christianity, we help others. Jesus spoke of feeding the hungry, clothing those who had little, visiting the sick, and more. And we now know that we are to love God and do acts of love to our neighbors, not passively love our neighbors, but actively do something.

Another thing we have in common is practice. Players don't get to an NFL team without years of practice. A team doesn't get to Super Sunday without months of practice. Scouts learn and practice new skills. A badge or a palm isn't given 'just because'. Each involves the mastery of a skill...and that only comes with practice. As Christians, we're given the opportunity to practice our faith everyday. To walk, as Jesus did, here on this earth and to face situations similar to what he must surely have faced. We can choose to deal with difficult people and unpleasant situations in ways that show and extend grace.

Football, Scouting and Christianity all have rules. There are rules of the football game, there're laws in scouting; and there are the Commandments. Jesus gave us the most important ones—the ones we heard today.

Teamwork is essential. Tom Brady, Gronk, Stephon Gilmore, and Julian Edelman all have their own roles, but they and every person on the team are equally important. They work together to execute plays and win games. In scouting, teamwork is a fundamental element. In Christianity, we're told to do acts of love to our neighbors. That means everyone. Each of us has a part in that. Even Jesus worked with others. He had a team of twelve disciples.

We all also have leadership. In football, Bill Belichick coaches the team to the Big Game. In scouting, there are Scoutmasters who help lead youth to adulthood. In Christianity, Jesus was referred to as a shepherd...one who lead sheep from place to place and kept them safe along the journey.

If you're willing to play along now, would you please raise your hand if you are a scout or if you were ever a scout? Thank you. I, too was a scout. I wonder if your experience was at all like mine.

I remember the sense of challenge I felt when attempting something new in order to get a patch and the sense of accomplishment I felt when I'd mastered a new skill. I remember the sense of community I felt when we marched together in a parade. And the sense of helpfulness I felt when we did good deeds in the community. I'll never forget the sense of belonging I felt when I wore my uniform. Today, the scouts are wearing theirs.

Let's just say there were a Christian 'uniform' we could put on...and it came with a sash. What might be on that sash? A cross? (Ok). The church name where the troop number would be? (Sure.)

What else? What would those badges look like? How about praying hands to show relationship with God? Clapsed hands...for a show of solidarity? Extended hands to show a sense of helpfulness?

Would you tell others about your badges with a sense of pride? (And do you speak of church with a sense of pride?)

One critical component of church is relationship. I dare say that one critical component of scouting is also relationship. Here's the BSA oath: "On my honor, I will do my best To do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; To help other people at all times; To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight."

Friends, could it be that you just heard a similar message here today? And could it be that Jesus shared a similar message centuries ago?!

Earlier I said that football players and scouts wear uniforms and that Christians can choose to do so as well. Let's go back to our Scripture one final time, using Hebrew as our starting point. You shall love

God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength and you shall do (acts of) love to your neighbor.”

What if that uniform Christians can put on each day is “love”? But, our call isn't to passively wear the love, it's to actively wear that love. That's the only way we can let others see the uniform...through our actions. Blessed Be and Amen.

Sources: [Scouting.org](http://Scouting.org), [Chaimbentorah.com](http://Chaimbentorah.com), <http://oldebible.com/youngs-literal-translation/leviticus-19.asp>