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Message

Words to Live By

There is probably not one single person here that does not know that Yeshua reduced the Ten Commandments down to two, probably because of attitudes like this in this cartoon I saw this week. Some three thousand years ago or so two men were looking at the stone tablets that Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai. They are studying them for a while, when one of them finally says to the other, "I don't know about you, but I've only found a couple that work for me." (Jesse Caldwell ... 02.07.2001)

Jesus reduced the Ten Commandments down to two.

Loving God, loving neighbor and loving self seems so very simple, does it not? And yet why is it so difficult to do all three? Some folks say they love God but hate their neighbor. Some folks say they love their neighbor, but hate themselves. When Jesus was asked which commandment in the law was the greatest, he did not pull from the Ten Commandments given to Moses. Yeshua pulls from Deuteronomy when formulating the answer to this question. Hear these words from the Book of Deuteronomy:

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9

The first commandment Jesus offers has been around for thousands of years, but the second commandment, just 2000 years ago or so: *“and love your neighbor as you love yourself.”*

I can tell you from personal experience that many of my parishioners over the years have had the most difficulty with the last part: *loving self.*

Why is it so difficult for so many Christians to love themselves? One of the reasons is that we are taught to put others needs before our own and when we don't that guilt thing goes to work. Some of us grew up with the guilt thing which may be why so many folks have left the church.

As we hear from Ecclesiastes 3, *“For everything there is a season and for every matter under heaven,”* there are times in order to truly love others, we must put ourselves first. This fable by Rabbi Edwin Friedman changed the course of my life, because I tended to put the needs of others before myself. Furthermore, not only did I put the needs of others before myself, I tended to become enmeshed with them, thinking that I was actually helping them, when I was not. This fable by Rabbi Friedman should be read and studied by everyone who has difficulty in establishing healthy boundaries between you and others who apparently need to be rescued. Now, please do not misunderstand me, I am not promoting selfishness, but instead a more healthy sense of “selflessness” which does not diminish some of our most basic needs. One of our most basic needs is to be true to ourselves and when we put the needs of others at the expense of being true to ourselves, we run into trouble. This fable you are about to hear has helped thousands with this need in being able to be true to ourselves. While I thought the graduates might grow spiritually hearing this fable, this fable is for all of us.

The Bridge by Rabbi Edwin Friedman

The title of this fable is “The Bridge.” A man is on his way to the opportunity of a lifetime. There is a bridge between him and his destination. He starts walking across it but is interrupted by a stranger. / The stranger asks the man to hold the

end of a rope. The other end of the rope is tied around the stranger's waist. The man is confused, but the stranger is polite, so he agrees. "Hold tight," the stranger says, just before jumping off the bridge. / The man panics but manages to brace himself and keep hold of the rope. The stranger dangles between the bridge and the water below. The man's grip is the only thing stopping the stranger from falling to his death. Overwhelmed, the man thinks, What have I gotten myself into? / The man tries to figure out how to get the stranger back to safety. The stranger is just so heavy, and the rope is just so long, that he cannot get enough leverage to pull the stranger up. No one else is around, there is no place to tie the rope, and the stranger offers no help. They are stuck. The man doesn't want to let the rope go. The stranger would die. He also doesn't want to miss the opportunity of a lifetime that awaits him on the other side of the bridge. / "Why did you do this?" the man calls out. / "Remember," says the stranger, "If you let go, I will be lost." / "But I cannot pull you up," the man cries. / "I am your responsibility," says the stranger. / "Well, I did not ask for it," the man says. / "If you let go, I am lost," repeats the stranger. / The man thinks of an idea! If the stranger climbs up the rope a bit, the man will have enough leverage to pull the stranger back to safety. The man tells the stranger his plan. He urges the stranger to hurry, but the stranger takes no action. / The man is irate now. "I want you to listen carefully," he says, "Because I mean what I am about to say. I will not accept the position of choice for your life, only my own. The position of choice for your own life I hereby give back to you." / The man tells the stranger he is going to let go of the rope if the stranger does not make the effort. The stranger responds, "You would not be so selfish. I am your responsibility." The man waits for the stranger to make his choice. The stranger either doesn't believe the man or does not care, because he makes no effort. The story ends when the man says, "I accept your choice," and frees his hands from the rope.

Personally, I wished I had had this fable given to me in my Senior year in High School, or at the very latest my Senior year in college. It would have helped me a great deal in at least two things. **First** it would have helped me to establish healthy boundaries in some of my relationships. **Why?**

Because I have picked up some ropes that were handed to me and I should have slept on it before taking the rope and saying, “Yes, I would do that.” For some of us, we have a tendency to say yes more than we should and are holding on to more ropes that we can handle adequately and responsibly.

Second, it would have taught me to truly love myself and honor my needs as well as the needs of others and in the case of this fable, to honor the choices of others. The man and the stranger in this fable became enmeshed when the man took on something he had no business taking on with this stranger who would not help himself. Since the stranger would not take responsibility for himself, the man was free to let go and let God!

I have realized over the years that family, work, friends and service organizations are always trying to hand us ropes and before we have the chance to think about it and to weigh the consequences of said decision, we find ourselves overwhelmed with too many ropes to handle in our lives. Before you pick up a rope, sleep on it and discern whether or not this is something you truly want to do. If not, politely say, “no thank you, it is not a good fit right now.”

We can indeed be selfless in serving others, but at the same time, we need to be true to ourselves and our calling from God and not get sidetracked like the man in this fable picking up a rope that would detour his call from God. When we stay true to our calling while at the same time serving others, we will know not only love, but JOY as well! Amen!

Let us prepare for the Sacrament of Holy Communion by singing the first three verses of “I Come with Joy”:

Hymn of Preparation # 617

I Come With Joy vs. 1-3