

St. James' E-pistle

February 21, 2014

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

In my Junior year in high school, my mother fell off a ladder at work (she had a wallpaper and interior decorating business), and broke her leg. Badly.

She was in the hospital for a week and came out with a cast all the way up to her hip. She stayed in a cast for six months. Her wallpaper business had to close down - but then, she wasn't sure she ever wanted to get up on a ladder again. In the course of the next few months, however, she started going to physical therapy and had an epiphany. She did not want to be a wallpaper hanger. She wanted to be a physical therapist.

So, with four kids in college, my mom started back to work on her degree. The problem was, she still had a cast on. The logistical gymnastics required just to get her to class were a feat I'm not sure I'll ever fully understand. And the miracle of managing to survive with now five family members in college and one less income - I marvel at how my parents pulled this off.

But throughout all this, my mom just smiled and said, "I know this must be good because the devil is working so hard to make sure it won't happen."

As it turns out, it was good, and Mom had a great career - her true calling.

What always impressed me was not Mom's strong determination to soldier on through the difficulties as if she were in some war. She didn't battle through them, she danced. What impressed me was her conviction that the difficulties were confirmation of just how good things were going to be.

Many's the time I've thought about that when things were difficult. "This is going to be good - otherwise the devil wouldn't be working so hard to stop it." You can argue the theology of it, but there's something to believing that behind hard times lies a diamond waiting to be found.

I was thinking about that this week while raking the roof. There's fear of roof collapse, of leaking and - with the impending warmer weather - flooding. Driving is dangerous. Heating bills are high. People are trapped in their homes, keeping church attendance lower than usual. Everyone's burned out.

And Lent is coming!

That means scrambling to get meditations, scrambling to get people to come to Shrove Tuesday, scrambling to get ready for Ash Wednesday, scrambling ... well scrambling eggs for the Lenten Breakfasts. In the midst of more snow.

St. James' E-pistle

February 21, 2014

How do we face all this?

Well, I'm thinking this is going to be a great - I mean great Lent and Easter. It has to be because otherwise, the devil wouldn't be working so hard to make sure it doesn't happen.

In Christ,

Chuck+

St. James' E-pistle

February 21, 2014

The News of the Church

Lenten Meditations: At this point, there are fourteen slots open for Lenten Meditations. Some have already started to come in, and I look forward to seeing yours! If you haven't signed up yet, please do so either by e-mailing Fr. Chuck or signing up this Sunday. Thanks!

Inquirers Class Meeting: Everyone who has signed up to be in the Inquirers Class will meet in the Wilks Room at 11:30 a.m. on **Sunday, March 2nd**. Please be sure to be there. Guidelines for the class will be given out as well as a syllabus. Thanks!

Shrove Tuesday Approaching: Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper will start at 6:00 PM on Shrove Tuesday itself which this year is **March 4th**. As always, it will include "Fr. Chuck's Pancake Decorating Fun" so get your decorating hats on! Kids of all ages are invited to feast first, then pull out the candies, icing and all sorts of artistic goodies to turn ordinary pancakes into works of art.

Items Left: Several items have been left in the garage and in the attic hall, including in front of the attic doors, as we are not sure to whom they belong or what they were brought here for. Currently, only the Nursery School has tag sales, and the teachers wanted to know if those items were brought for them to sell. Their request is that if you have an item to donate for their tag sale, please inform the office and ask for instructions about where to put the items. It is not safe to leave them on the landing blocking the door. Nor is it safe to put too much in the garage. If the items are not for the Nursery School tag sale, please contact the office to let them know what they should do with them. Thanks!

Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Kathleen Craft, Michael Day, Jane Gagliardoto, Kasey Gaulin, Jack Gordy, Andy Hall, Harold Hall, Brooke Helton, Rev. Don Hoger, Dalton K., Barbara Knakal, Rosemary Leuken, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Clifford Plass, Gerald Plass, Deborah Porach, John Robinson, John Schroeder, Marty Schroeder, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Debbie Stone, Gloria Veach, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way and Cliff Wells.

St. James' E-pistle

February 21, 2014

Schedules

A Note about Schedules: The names you see below are those listed on their respective schedules. There are often times when, due to sickness or travel, substitutes are asked to fill in or trade positions. This will probably NOT be reflected in the lists below—so, if there is an inconsistency between what you see here and what you see on Sunday, that is alright.

Birthdays:	Deb Belding, Elizabeth Gabel, Meg Burkhardt and Tadhg O'Halloran
Acolytes:	February 23: Mike Minter, Nancy Montero, Skye O'Halloran and Monica Rizzo March 2: Eden Ciferri, Rebecca Gausepohl and Chris Santos
Altar Guild:	February 23: Team II March 2: Team II
8 a.m. Readers:	February 23: Debbie Belding and Jim Smyth March 2: Angela Henry and Lucille Ogden
10 a.m. Readers:	February 23: Donna Beyer/Deirdre Mae Micker March 2: Patty Caswell/Justin Bohlmann
Ushers:	February 23: Donna and John Beyer March 2: Dean Caswell and Austin Horne
Pledge Clerks:	February 23: Paul Littlefield and Dean Caswell March 2: Deb and Doug Belding
Coffee Hour Hosts:	February 23: The O'Halloran Family March 2: The Shahanis and Audrey Horne

This Week's Lectionary

Leviticus 19:1-2,9-18
Psalm 119:33-40
1 Corinthians 3:10-11,16-23
Matthew 5:38-48

St. James' E-pistle

February 21, 2014

Sermon Preached on
Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany
(February 16, 2014)

"You Go Too Far"

If you ever want to hear some wild things, the bible is a good place to start. Miracles, murder, mayhem - it's all there.

Not to mention God's retribution for all sorts of infractions. Look at the reading from Deuteronomy today where Moses brings the people right to the edge of the promised land and tells them to choose between a life serving God and a life serving other gods. He says it is a choice between prosperity and disaster, between life and death.

That's pretty rough.

But it's nothing compared to what Jesus says in today's gospel. Jesus goes too far.

This section of Matthew's gospel is part of the Beatitudes - you know, "blessed are the meek, the peace makers..." But this section -sometimes called the "Antitheses" - pushes the envelope. It has a pattern that goes something like this: "You have heard it said... But I tell you..."

You have heard it said that you shall not murder, but I say to you that if you are angry with your neighbor, you're just as guilty.

You have heard it said that you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you that if you even *look* at a woman with lust, you're already guilty. (If you're a literalist and you like men, then you should be happy to note that there's no prohibition against looking at men with lust).

You have heard it said you can give a woman a certificate of divorce, but I say to you that if you do, you're guilty of divorce.

You have heard it said that you shall not swear falsely, but I say don't swear at all. Anything beyond yes or no is from the evil one.

Wow.

And that's not all! He says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off."

These are some of those hard sayings that people are often troubled by. I suspect part of the trouble is the whole concept of: "If a part of your body causes you to sin, get rid of it." Let's

St. James' E-pistle

February 21, 2014

dispose of that one right away. Your eye doesn't cause you to sin. Your hand doesn't cause you to sin. It may be the agent, the part of your body you use in the commission of the sin, but it does not cause you to sin. That happens in the soul.

I suggest that Jesus knows this. I suggest he's saying, "If only it were an eye or a hand, that would be easy. Cut it off, and you're good to go." But your soul - that's impossible to get rid of.

So, in essence, NOW Jesus is saying, if you get angry, you're doomed to hell. If you look at someone with lust, you're doomed to hell. If you swear, you're doomed to hell. There's no sacrifice you can make to fix that.

Is it any wonder that people often said, "You go too far"?

Jesus takes all these laws that everyone accepts, and pushes them way beyond the bounds of anything that is acceptable or reasonable. I mean, People understood Moses's commands. God is jealous: don't cheat on God, don't make him mad. We get that. That's reasonable.

But Jesus? He's not even talking about God. He's talking about how we treat each other. And the standards? Ridiculous.

I mean who here hasn't gotten angry at someone? Who here has not held a grudge? Who here hasn't called someone else a fool or the equivalent?

For that matter, who here hasn't looked at someone else lustfully? Who here hasn't sworn an oath? (Remembering that anyone who serves in the military swears an oath. Anyone who holds public office swears an oath. Anyone who's a witness in a trial swears an oath).

What is Jesus getting at by pushing these reasonable laws - don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't bear false witness - way beyond the capacity of anyone to do it? [Now, a word about divorce. Jesus slips that in there with adultery, did you notice? Only, in those days, it was only a man who could divorce a woman, not the other way around. The guy could just write a certificate of divorce and be done with her for whatever reason. He could do that because the woman was viewed as property more than a person. Certainly not an equal. So when Jesus says divorce is akin to adultery, he's saying that this is no business transaction - it's a relationship being violated.]

Anyway, back to the question of what Jesus is getting at by pushing them to the breaking point. The answer is remarkably simple: It is precisely that we do not have the capacity to live lives good enough for the kingdom of heaven. We can neither expect of ourselves nor of others absolute adherence to "the law." Well, we can expect it, but we know it will not happen.

And God knows it will not happen.

St. James' E-pistle

February 21, 2014

Jesus is telling his disciples that earning your way to heaven will not happen. The only thing that will get you there is loving trust in God.

Not that God doesn't have expectations. Jesus really means it when he says it is offensive to God for us to be angry at each other. He really means it when he says it's offensive to God for us to look at each other like an object rather than a human being. It really is offensive to God for us to swear to try to convince people that we're telling the truth - as if we would not tell the truth at all times.

But offending God and making God stop loving us are two entirely different things.

Jesus says, "You will never earn your ticket to heaven. You can't. But you will never be denied that ticket as long as you want to be part of this family of God."

Jesus pushes us too far sometimes - to the breaking point. And that's the point. We have to get beyond the old, "Follow the rules and you'll get what you deserve" mentality. Trust in God's love, and we all will get what none of us deserves. Amen.