

St. Paul: On The Same page

02.09.14 for Epiphany 6a

Day One: Deut. 30:15-20

¹⁵See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.

¹⁶For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

“Well, if you put it *that way*...”

We face choices all the time. About many of them we are ambivalent. We could go either way, and we might even let the choice wait for years before we decide whether to invest, whether to change jobs, whether to move, whether to go back to school. All these things are life changing, but we know they could be good or bad in different ways.

But if it's a choice between “life and prosperity, death and destruction” you'd think that would be different. If you have a choice between life and death, you would make that right away, and it wouldn't require a lot of thought, right? Our obedience

“Neither he who plants
nor he who waters is
anything, but only God
who gives the growth.

For we are God's
fellow workers.”

Corinthians 3:7-9

to God's law should be easy.
And yet it's not.

We know right from wrong, and yet we hesitate between them. Just as Satan promised that Adam and Eve would not die, he deceives us into thinking that following our own desires might be better. No wonder our lives and our world are so broken!

But God did not hesitate. He didn't vacillate. When we were disobedient, Jesus was obedient. He kept the law for us so that we could live!

Prayer: *Father, I have broken your law, not once, but many, many times. Forgive me, for Jesus' sake, and set my feet upon the right path once again. Amen.*

Day Two: 1 Cor 3:1-9

¹Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. ²I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

I confess; I used to dislike steak. Steak! My older siblings mocked me mercilessly, but I preferred hamburger because it was easier to eat. I didn't have to cut it up. I didn't have to chew it so many times.

Do we sometimes prefer something inferior because it seems easier to us?

Marriage is hard.

Commitment is hard. Working and saving for things is hard. It seems easier just to use other people than to love them and sacrifice for them and painstakingly build a long-term relationship. It seems easier just to borrow, and even easier to steal or to enjoy the benefits of other people's work than to work hard ourselves. It seems easier to take what we can get, rather than to give to others.

Are you an infant or an adult? Do you want God to give you an easy path – to let someone else do the hard work?

You may not be ready for the really heavy lifting, but God calls you to lift more than you are lifting now. He calls you to give more – to sacrifice more – to listen more – to love more. God does not call you to just stay where you are, like a person snuggled in a warm bed. God calls you to grow up, one challenge at a time.

Maybe God's plan for your life today seems too hard, too heavy, too chewy for you. Consider, if the solid food is hard to swallow, might it also have greater "nutrition" or blessing for you?

Go ahead, take a swig of milk. But then turn back to the good food that God has placed for you, maybe cut it into smaller bites, and enjoy growing up and being strengthened by his grace.

Prayer: *O Lord, just as I thank you at each meal for the food upon my plate, I thank you today for every way in which you are nourishing me. Give me strength to serve you. Amen.*

Day Three

Gospel: Matthew 5:21-37

²¹ *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

If you grew up with brothers and sisters, as I did, these words of Jesus sound impossibly hard! Who could ever keep them? Children often call each other much worse names than “fool.”

Adults, on the other hand, do a little less name calling in overt ways. Instead, we demean one another in more creative ways. A recent article called that habit “micro-aggression.” But even if it’s subtle, and even though we might pretend to be innocent and say, “Who me?” we still know that we’re guilty.

Of course, that is Jesus’ point. He spoke these words to people who were confident that they could keep God’s law. They thought they

were good enough. “At least I’m not as bad as some!” they said.

But Jesus pointed out that the meaning of God’s law “you shall not murder” came from its root, “love your neighbor as yourself.” It was immediately obvious to his listeners that they were guilty.

How do you see yourself? As a hopeless sinner in need of redemption – or as a person who is mostly OK, tries hard, who deserves an ‘A’ for effort? It is the hopeless sinner to whom Jesus offers hope – and help – and life.

If you are a hopeless sinner, if you can’t seem to love others as much as you love yourself, if you look at others and you put names on them in your effort to put yourself above, and you live in bitterness instead of love, then I have good news for you. Jesus came just for you!

And Jesus has a name to call you... Forgiven!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you know how I am with my brothers and sisters. There are 6 billion of them whom you love, but I care for less than a handful, and none so much as I love myself. Forgive me, Savior, and teach me to love. Amen.*

Day Four: Send a Valentine

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but indeed and in truth.

1 John 3:16-18

Next Friday people will celebrate St. Valentine's Day, but their celebration will have little to do with the Christ-like love that Saint Valentine displayed.

When we were children, Valentine's Day was sometimes a day to be cruel. Trying to avoid that, our teachers required us to give cards to **all** of our classmates if we were going to bring cards for any. But even then, we looked at the cheap little cards we had and we gave our least favorite cards to those we liked least. Then we compared who had received the most or the best cards, and we wished that we were as popular or as well liked as some of our classmates.

Now as adults our behavior is little better. We may not offend others as

much in such petty ways. But we use Valentine's Day, and we use romance itself not to serve others or show love for them, but to serve ourselves.

Romantic love is selfish love. We enjoy the feelings of being in love, the dating, the candlelight, and the physical pleasure. But real love is that which remains when romance is gone. When we serve others without reward, when we care for those who cannot care for us, when we are there through the hard days and the sad times, that is real love. Real love is sacrifice.

Little children, John calls you in his letter. And that is what we are. "Little children, love one another." Like kids in a classroom, we need the Teacher to show us how to love. The Teacher, Jesus, loves us all the same, even though we cannot do anything for him.

The Teacher pours out love on us that we can share with all our classmates.

Prayer: *Dear Savior, I have learned what real love is from you. Let your love overflow from me this week to someone who needs to be loved. Point me, like an arrow, to someone in need. Amen.*