

St. Paul: On The Same page

02.16.14 for Epiphany 7a

Day One: Lev. 19:1-2, 9-18

The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy..."

"When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God."

What does it mean to be holy? We normally think it involves not committing adultery, or not stealing, maybe it also requires making a big donation to the church.

These verses give the word "holy" a surprising meaning. What difference does it make if we harvest the edges and corners of a field, or go back to pick up what was missed? Why should it matter if we pick up all the grain or leave some behind?

Holiness means love. It means trusting God enough that you can afford to give freely to others. God calls us

"Each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Corinthians 3:11

to trust that he will provide for us. And if we trust in him, then we will be happy to leave some of the abundance he gives us for the poor to gather.

You probably don't have fields or harvests, but do you squeeze the last drop out of what you have? Or do you have leftovers, extras, something that you could *give* instead of *sell*? If God is taking care of you, then who does he give you the ability to take care of? Who might be blessed by God's blessing to you?

Prayer: *Father, I do not just have enough. I have much more than enough. You have blessed me every day of my life. Now I pray, give me an overflowing heart as well, so that your love may overflow from me to others. Amen.*

Day Two: 1 Cor. 3:10-13

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

I'm looking at a nice little house. It was built a little over 100 years ago. It stands straight and seems to be in good shape. But if I follow the steps down to the basement I see that water is seeping through the walls. Not only the mortar, but the cement blocks are disintegrating. They are crumbling apart. In fact, there is a growing hole in the back wall where bricks have begun to fall out.

When that house was built, the foundation looked solid. But the material was just not strong enough to stand the test of time.

Mostly we don't think about what will happen 100 years from now. Certainly none of us will be here to see it. But every day we lay a foundation that needs to last much longer than a century.

How long will your children live? What century will your grandchildren see?

What challenges to their faith will they face in college, in work, in marriage, in old age? Will their faith weather those storms?

Paul says that we are like builders. Every part is important. But the foundation is especially critical. We might think that we are doing well because we teach our children a lot of information about religion. But Paul says there is only one real foundation for eternal life, and that is Jesus himself.

Our children need to know Jesus – and that happens when we know him, when we talk to him, when we welcome him into our homes, our conversations, our activities every day. It happens when we admit that we too are sinful and in need of Jesus' mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus will probably not be the foundation of your child's life, if he is not the foundation of yours.

Prayer: *O Lord Jesus, you used the most unlikely people to build your church. Thank you for the part you have assigned to me. Lead me to rejoice in the part that others can play, and let me encourage them to join in. Amen.*

Day Three: Matthew 5:41-42

If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

When Jesus says we should go with someone an extra mile, we're talking about walking here, not running. After all, they didn't have the same culture of running for recreation back then that we have now.

Instead, walking was the main way of getting from place to place. You walked to work. You walked to market. You walked to get water. And most likely you walked on long journeys as well.

Apparently this was something that any Roman soldier could require of a Jew, that you carry their pack or their shield or some other burden for one mile. After that they would have to find some other victim.

So this enforced walking was not exercise. It wasn't social time. It was pure punishment. It was hazing. It was humiliation. When you reached the end of your mile, you would not only be glad to drop your load. You would

also be glad to be rid of your tormentor.

That first mile was probably walked while fuming and grumbling. But what about the 2nd mile? If you voluntarily pick up the pack again and carry it further, doesn't that change things?

Indeed, it would. The next 5,280 feet would no longer be humiliation. They would be your gift. The 2nd mile would be your choice. During the 2nd mile you not only carry a burden, you have now also laid a burden down – the burden of anger and resentment.

During the 2nd mile, when you willingly serve someone else, that is your chance to talk, to see the path from a new point of view, and to share the freedom that you have with someone whose burden you are only carrying for a little while.

When the 2nd mile is done you will hand the burden back. But will you have given the person anything of greater value?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you carried my burden to the cross. Help me to carry another's burdens today, so that they may know you. Amen.*

Day Four: Matthew 5:43-46

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

Jesus said if someone would compel us to walk a mile, we should walk another mile as well. But now his teaching becomes even more pointed. He says we must not only serve some inconvenient person – he says that we ought to love our enemy.

I’m pretty sure you would say that you love your family, even though that’s sometimes a struggle. And I’ll bet you care about most of your co-workers, and maybe even your neighbors.

But can your heart stretch any further? How far away from yourself can you get and still see that these are people whom Jesus loves and for whom he died? As these people become less a part of your daily life, don’t they get harder to really care about?

Oh sure, you can make a donation to send rice to people you don’t know and will never meet. But can you actually love and care about people who are an irritation in your life – people whom you would rather avoid?

You can’t. Not by yourself. But what if we change the categories by which we have sorted people out? Instead of those close to me, those who love me, and then those who are progressively further away from me – what if we look at all these people as those people whom Jesus loves? Here are those people for whom God gave his Son. What shall I do with them?

And when we see those who are difficult, what if their category is “those who are in greater need of Jesus’ love”?

You already have Jesus’ total love. Who in your life needs more?

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 to someone in need. Amen.*