

November 26, 2017

## **SIMPLE TASKS, EASIER SAID THAN DONE**

Prayer

May the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

It's no news that the holidays can bring out the best and worst in people. They are stressful, chaotic, and throw us all out of our routine. In my family, Thanksgiving week is generally the most trying time of the holidays; one filled with mixed emotions and our fair share of chaos and challenges. But probably not for the reasons one might think.

You see, I'm the middle of five children and so, on Thanksgiving, there is certain to be plenty of struggles. We'll debate on who's favorite dish will be served, who gets to sit where, and who will be the chosen one to get the last bit of mashed potatoes. But even after the big day has passed us, the true test remains ahead, no not on Black Friday, but on Saturday. Rivalry Saturday for College football that is.

As some of you may know, I graduated from the University of Florida. What you may not know, is the rest of my family either attended or pledges their allegiance to that other state school a bit up the road. So each year, on the Saturday following Thanksgiving, I am reminded that I am not like the rest of them and to some may even be beneath them, simply for my preference of blue and orange.

This year was no different, as yesterday I sat, sandwiched between my younger siblings praying for God to give me patience to handle both the Gators offense and my family's borderline excessive boasts for their team. Okay, yes I may have also prayed for Florida to shock the nation

with a win- might as well go all out 'ya know? However, as the game progressed and my dreams of a victory were slowly exiting my thoughts, and my brother's persistent cheering grew louder; I began to ask God's help with something else.

I began to ask him to help me to continue to love and accept my family, even at times like now, when it seems they all are against me. Yes it may seem silly to some that I was asking God to help me to love my family- I mean they're my family right? I'm supposed to love them at all times, that's part of the deal. But sometimes that is much easier said than done. It may be hard to love them when they make harmful decisions or are destructive, but should it really be hard simply to love them when we're disagreeing over a football team? Of course, the answer is no- but yet there I was, yesterday asking God's help to do just that.

Though I am thankful, I was aware of my pride and competitiveness attempting to get the best of me and sought out God's help. I can't help but wonder just how many times I have fallen short of loving my neighbors. Because surely if I was losing it with my family over a simple football game, then I may have lost it with my friends, colleagues, or even strangers.

It seems fitting that in today's Gospel reading, Jesus is continuing to describe the Kingdom of Heaven, but instead of simply describing it he is going further to describe just who will be welcomed and invited to inherit the kingdom. He tells the crowd, that the nations will be separated between the righteous and unrighteous. I'm not sure about you, but when I hear the word righteous, I tend to think that is describing someone or something far greater or superior than I could ever aspire to be. Yet here Jesus is sharing the simple way anyone could be claimed as "righteous" and therefore inherit the kingdom of heaven.

He says that those who satisfy the thirsty, feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, care for the sick or imprisoned will be the ones to inherit the kingdom. Simple tasks, that once again may be easier said than done. Because Jesus specifically says we aren't to do these things just when the recipient is someone important or worthy, but instead are to do these to even "the least" of the members of his family.

I imagine some of those listening to Jesus may have thought the same thing, that perhaps this task is too large or that they are not righteous enough to do all that he is asking. I think it seems like a daunting task primarily for two reasons. The first, because we see all of these words: feed, welcome, care, visit. They're all actions, there's nothing passive about them. It means we are called to actively do, not just be.

I think back to elementary school, when I was taught tolerance. To tolerate other people, other ideas, other things. I think about how easy it was because it didn't require doing much. I think now of how I wished they taught acceptance instead. Yes, it asked for a bit more of work, and was easier taught than lived out, still it is something our world is missing. Why is it, that we tend to seek the easiest or quickest way out? Maybe it's because we're busy and are trying to do too much. However, I think if we were to find the easiest way to "do" all of this, to feed, welcome, care, visit, it would boil down to one verb- to love.

Jesus was and is calling us simply to love each and every member of his family. An act that can hardly ever be handled without doing. The hardest part of loving each and every member of his family may be that that we forget how large Jesus' family really is. It's convenient to love the members who think and act like you or support the same football team as you.

It's a lot harder when you can't seem to find any common ground. I think that is when we are asked to dig deeper, try harder, or do more-

to find a way to love. Because just as we are created in God's image, aren't we supposed to see God in each one of us, and even in the least of us? More importantly, we are to recognize that we are called to do this always, indefinitely, but he knows we are going to fall short. We may even mess it up, but thankfully we serve a God who loves us all, and forgives us all.

Each year we are reminded of God's endless love for us with the best reminder, the gift of his son. But before we get there, let us take this Advent season as a time to not only prepare our hearts for the birth of Jesus, but as a time to really try to actively do more. To love more. To do the things that are easier said, than done. To truly love our neighbors as Christ loves us and to experience the kingdom of heaven now. Why wait, why not take the quickest route- just this once?

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