

*“Continue...Come...Close-r!”*

*“Come...Closer...Choose Life!”*

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Sirach 15:15-20,

Matthew 5: 21-37 selected verses: 21-24,

27-30, 33, 37

February 16, 2020

Before Readings:

Our scriptures this day are a commentary on the deeper meaning of the commandments...on following the commandments....not 10 things not to do, but the 10 best ways to live.

Interpreted to the whole of the people in Deuteronomy by Moses, then to individuals in Sirach, and then through Jesus addressing the nuances so that we might realize that, for example, though most of us will not kill anyone, we do kill off people’s energy and spirit and possibilities...and this is deadly.

Jesus interprets the commandments to addresses:

- ~anger and disrespect,
- ~putting forth a good outward show when there is inner and relational conflict,
- ~all the ways we lust/covet in our culture,
- ~right relationship always-even in divorce,
- ~and saying what you mean and then doing it rather than dramatically swearing to do something you have no intention of doing. Yes is yes and No is no.

So, these 10 Best Ways to live do indeed apply!

But if it’s too much, then just remember it all boils down to one great commandment that is not too hard for you.

Can you name it?

*We bring to a close this Ordinary time that follows Advent and Christmas and Epiphany. Remember...*

*~O Come.*

*~O, Come ...Close*

*~Continue...Come...Close-r!*

*Through Advent trusting, we found ourselves once again in a Christmas ...stunned to know and embrace this new reality:*

*Even when we are not able to come to grips with our lives, not able or knowing how to come close to God:*

*God comes. To Us. Intentionally Close to us... an unconditional, universal love birthing in us possibility we never could have conceived of on our own.*

*To show us the way to continue, this Universal Christ energy is given the human face of Jesus.*

*So, we have been asking ourselves...and today, ask yourself:*

*What exactly is it / AM continuing?  
Allowing to continue in my life?*

“I have set before you today  
life and prosperity, death and adversity.”

Life and prosperity... What does it mean...to prosper?

How would we define prosperity? How would you?  
Is it a measure of...things, relationships, an attitude?

And death and adversity?  
Is it literal death that's meant?

Or, is there something more deadly to us than death itself? *Certainly Jesus thought there was!*

When I think of facing adversity...it's...

- ~having to reset a household budget because one wage earner has lost a job,
- ~or having to stop halfway through college to work for a couple of years in order to pay for the rest of college,
- ~or balancing many schedules and needs,
- ~the death of a loved one,
- ~dealing with and wrestling with feelings of self-doubt and aloneness that sometimes lead to loneliness.

These are serious adversities, yes,  
but probably not life-threatening.

So what might be “the” adversity that equates to death for us...that's killing us...*something far more deadly than death itself?*

(By the way, lack of shelter these past days was a death dealing adversity so I want to be sure to be clear!

And you didn't shy away! I've never known you to shy away!)

*Might* the adversity implied here be the times and ways we cut ourselves off from or reject God...

that is, lose perspective and purpose and integrity...

lose our God connection...often manifest in our relationship with others?!

Times we go it alone.

Locking others out of our lives or thinking

we know it all, we're right, so we can and will go it alone!

A time when we reject other's caring insight or help...don't answer the phone calls/even acknowledge to ourselves others are reaching out,

don't make the call to someone else for help (or offer help to that someone who needs it),  
pity parties with lots of potato chips so you stay long  
choosing to cut yourself off and your options down?  
Times when you do this...deadly?

Death dealing adversity is, in a sense,  
when you close yourself off in a way that you essentially  
have no name, no identity, no being,  
so no hope and perspective...

and for most of us, there is a choice about this.

And so then, much of the adversity we wrestle with is illusion we've created for ourselves often out of fear...maybe fear of further rejection...

but none the less, at least in part, our own projections...  
allowing us to hide and stay stuck.  
To make things worse than they really are!

And you heard it in both OT readings:  
you have permission to make life giving choices...expectation to make such choices...  
in fact, no one else will or can make the choice for you!

Deuteronomy addresses us corporately to look at "our" admonition to choose wisely.  
And to choose Life!

As part of the Wisdom Tradition,  
Sirach's version of encouragement focuses on our personal responsibility and accountability.

You can and need to step beyond the group...when the group falters, you need to step it up...  
a key awareness in these current political times.

The underlying issue is how to use your personal free will so as not to sin...meaning: turning away from right relationship, missing the mark, our failures to live our intentions.

Sirach puts it succinctly... "to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice" and "no one has permission from God to sin".

**God does not give you permission to treat yourself adversely...or anyone else either!**

Even in our culture where we shout about our right to individualism or independence, we often give in to a corporate mentality...a malaise crowd mentality which throws up its hands when it comes to responding to the way things are.

As if we had no power to live our own lives in new ways, to affect not only ourselves but newly impact others!

The Sirach passage provides a more powerful and direct admonition to resist this malaise...

Through an extreme encouragement!

How often, we let ourselves feel discouraged...as we blame “**them**” for the way things are with *us*.

Often, we don't feel we have any way to affect the bigger picture and what's going on around us...  
so we throw out the baby with the bathwater.

When we mess up, get down, face hard times,  
we throw out God and the faith we do have...

along with any hope for the change we so long for...  
which can only come through personal accountability!

It is so easy, too easy, for many of us to feel exempt  
from owning our personal power  
as we watch corporate choices being made that will affect us.

This is not a new phenomenon...  
for centuries we have put the blame on “them”

rather than take on our own accountability  
for the way things are in our lives and in the world.

When faced with choices that are complex or seem to be set up so you have to choose between the lesser of two evils,  
do you use complexity to justify a choice you know is wrong...death dealing?

Issues such as just war, abortion, divorce, welfare, and immigration are topics about which good people disagree  
and so, often no one takes action...or only over-reacts!

At home: how to budget time and money, who are our friends, how to help our children

develop inner discipline.

Closer to our church home are issues like should we spend money on the building or on ministry, or trust folks to honor their pledges and so spend budgeted moneys, act on whose church is it, who are we to care about, are we to minister to all the needs?

When things appear complex, do we then just give up and give over our power and our responsibilities?

Revert back to what is familiar and easy  
vs life giving and prosperous?

What does wisdom suggest to us? Wisdom **tells** us:

Giving up or giving over your power...  
**you don't have permission to do that!**

God doesn't want you to give in, yet God does not want you to burn out either. It's a balance God proposes.

God wants you to be in right relationships...within and with others.

God loves you, wants you, chooses you, is here for you...where are you?

Are you turning your back on possibility and giving in to the way things seem?

Sin...that's when we turn our back on God's intention for us and connection to us.  
When we find ourselves thinking small. Other definitions for sin?

This brokenness often shows up when we ignore the insights given through Moses to live the 10 best ways to be free...often called the Ten Commandments!

which Jesus addresses in Matthew...

Jesus expands their intention to include each of us personally for very few of us murder a person...

but many a spirit,

very few of us lust after a person...

but many after money or security,

very few of us commit adultery...but we cheat on ourselves in other ways

few of us divorce but many of us come home late or over schedule to avoid, or leave a situation unresolved and festering rather than put energy into being in right relationship.

We don't stay in or leave relationships with integrity.

We swear to do what we end up not doing rather than keeping it simple sweetheart...  
yes means yes and no means no.

Jesus is expanding and deepening the meaning of the commandments in his own gathered community.

And we are more like them than not.

This passage leads straight to the heart of three issues that need attention from most of us:

anger and reconciliation,  
lust/coveting/jealousy,  
and self-justification.

Life and death choices of integrity and soul.

Few if any of us probe our psyches or souls (think integrity/oneness within and with God all day in all ways).

Few probe beyond a modest level of emotional discomfort.

That is why we need each other to ask the incisive, painful, caring questions

that lance festering sores we cannot or don't dare touch on our own.

We be salt...salt in old and new wounds...that cleanses, purifies, heals, and preserves new life! Let that light shine from last week!

Jesus takes us right past our comfort level.

For a brief, sharp instant we are reminded  
that our sins/brokenness/aloneness ultimately matter.

These are not mere trivial matters of unimportance;  
they are a profound sundering of cosmic relationship.

The Ten Commandments are supplanted by:

**Empowered GRACE...do-overs...  
which implores us to choose life!**

Yes! You are the power! YOU ARE THE POWER!! Two year olds know it!

And if all this is too much for you? Jesus goes further to say there is really only one command that brings fullness and joy to life:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul and your neighbor as yourself.

*God says, I have come close.*

*You: Come...Closer...and Choose Life!*

We are to continue...to come...close-r and closer  
to our God, to our truest selves...  
to be pure delight...  
to be more fully human  
and divine.

Only you choose what it is you want to continue...