

Sermon for October 3, 2021  
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church  
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney  
Proper 22

Job 1:1; 2:1-10  
Psalm 26  
Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12  
Mark 10:2-16

It says in the Gospel of Mark today: “Some Pharisees came, and to test Jesus they asked...”

Of course they did. That’s what Pharisees do. They ask questions when they think they know the answers. The test is: Does he know the answers we know?

There are 613 commandments in the Hebrew Scriptures, actually in the first five books, the Pentateuch, the five books Jewish tradition ascribes to the authorship of Moses himself. That’s right, 613 commandments that Jesus boils down to two: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

But, according to Mark, “Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked...” It’s not that they really wanted to know, it’s just that they want to test: how far can I go? How close can I get? How hard can I push? What can I get away with?

That’s the opinion of humanity held by Satan in our reading from the Book of Job. The Lord holds up Job as an example of a righteous man. Satan responds:

“Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.”

So the Lord allows the testing of Job. We'll be examining that story in the coming weeks.

But for now, let us continue to pray: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

The temptation is what I fear. We want to push the limits of what is allowed. There's a publication that helps the wary, and those who want to push the envelope, how to avoid being audited by the IRS. The book marks those areas that "raise red flags" for the IRS computers, and too many red flags means "Uh-Oh."

We grow up understanding the "Adult World" where the reality seems to be: it's permissible to hang someone else out to dry if it means I'm okay.

We push. In my own case I'll push the speed limit because I believe that four miles an hour over won't set off the radar on the police car at the top of the hill.

We want to tell ourselves: If it's not illegal ... If I don't get caught...

"Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked..."

Jesus, what can I get away with?

What burdens can I carry without being overloaded?

What if I don't feel guilty about what I've done?

Does that mean it's all right?

And that's only about the stuff we do by ourselves. What about the rest of it? The reality for me is if I begin to rationalize, I hit the pause button. Given enough time, Humans can rationalize almost any behavior. My guiding principle is "If it feels wrong, don't do it."

The Gospel started off forbidding divorce, and ended with "what God has put together, let no one separate." After that, Jesus picks up a child,

proclaims that to enter the Kingdom of God we have to be like children, and blesses the child.

A lot of people get all tied up in the divorce issue, but for me, the significance in this passage comes in the “what God has put together.” You see, what God has put together is a relationship between God and humanity and between humanity and the world around us. We are in relationship, and that is what we must not separate from.

It’s a lot easier if we begin to see the world through the eyes of children. Children are attached to the world, open to cherish the world – so incredibly vulnerable.

The openness to the truth of the world and its beauty is what we must recapture as adults to be able to enter the Kingdom of God. That is the wonder we must embrace. That’s the world we must protect. That’s the care we must give each other.

Have you ever watched children play? I know there are exceptions, but I often have watched children of an age where they are not competing for their possessions, but enjoying each other by sharing their toys. I’ve seen children invite newcomers to enter into the play, and welcome others to be part of the group. There’s a way in which children make room for each other. Children, for the most part and not always, want to reach out to help one another. They see the world differently.

A friend of mine recently told me of driving about with his five-year-old daughter. When they drove past a field of wildflowers, he pulled over so they could enjoy the beauty. “I love wild flowers,” he told her. “Oh, those aren’t wildflowers,” she told him. “Those are the bouquets that the angels leave behind to show us that they’ve been here.”

The reading from the Letter to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 8:

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
or mortals, that you care for them?  
You have made them for a little while lower than the angels;  
you have crowned them with glory and honor,  
subjecting all things under their feet.”

There is a sense of responsibility being “a little lower than the angels” and our perspective shifts as we draw nearer to the Kingdom of God. In place of asking: What do I need? What do I want? We begin to think in terms of: What can I do? How can I help? So ...

So if we ask, how can I help, we can turn to St. Francis, who we will honor this afternoon in the service of consolation and blessing. St. Francis preached to the birds and animals of Creation, and he tells us in the Prayer attributed to him:

*Lord, make us instruments of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is discord, union;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.  
Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

And in the name of the One, True God who resurrected our Savior Jesus the Christ from the dead, I tell you ... *Amen.*