

**Deuteronomy 30:15-20****1 Corinthians 3:1-9****Matthew 5:21-30, 33-37**

I found out this week that we lose, on average, over 200,000 items apiece. We are liable to misplace as many as nine things a day. We lose money, we lose valuable things, we lose our car keys, we lose, like, half our socks. / And we lose more than just things - we lose arguments, we lose friendships, we lose jobs, and sometimes we even lose ourselves.

Sometimes we lose sight of what is really important. This is one of the dangers of being human, that we have this tendency towards chaos. It's not bad to be absent minded, or to not have complete control over the things in our lives. And we really don't want our things to control us.

But there's something about this tendency towards loss, and towards chaos, that spins us away from one another. It makes it hard to be people together. To be a community.

I think the thread of what Jesus is saying in the Sermon on the Mount is this: This is how to be community. It's hard, and everyone is welcome, and that's just going to make it more hard, because the work of this community is to bless those people that we don't want to bless. We are trying to get together to do God's plan on earth, to bring heaven right here right now, and it's going to mean that we need everybody we can get. We need everybody, and we can't afford to be losing anybody.

We need everybody, disciples, we need every person we can possibly get - men, we even need your wives.

We even need the wives.

I don't know, really, what to make of these teachings on divorce. I tend to think that neither Jesus as a single man, nor me as a person with all of eight months of experience being married, has any business giving the final word on marriage and divorce. I want to say that to fit into the rest of Jesus' teachings, we would have to have a very kind interpretation of these texts: that we are called to love each other, and to care for each other, and the kind of community Jesus was making demands that we all keep our commitments in caring for one another.

Except, now we know that of course sometimes the best way for people to care for each other in a contentious marriage is to leave it. And we have to be wise and kind to one another, around marriage. We have to keep caring for one another. And I just want to say a word about

divorce also, is that, this strong emphasis on the law around divorce is only one small teaching, but we are also taught not to gossip, slander or judge one another. So no matter what you think about people and their marriages, keep from speaking on it. By that I mean, keep your eyes on your own spouse, and be a kind, nonjudgmental friend when people navigate their marriages.

We are a community of believers that recognizes that the death of things is only the beginning, and resurrection comes after the darkest night. Resurrection in a broken relationship can look like many things: it can be a renewed trust born of true repentance and forgiveness, it can be a new joy as a single person, it can be a new relationship.

There is hope though that I read in these teachings on divorce: as a person who would like to be a religious leader, I find it hopeful that there is very clear provision made to include women in the category of people that matter, and being that this teaching is given directly to the disciples, even though Jesus himself was not married he was setting an expectation that it was normative that the disciples got married. So he's showing a view of community and religious leadership that explicitly includes women and families, not one that only includes very pious and celibate men. He could have set it up that way - the Essene community was contemporary with him, and they were a group of only men that concerned themselves with the law and holiness and writing. It is thanks to them that we have the Dead Sea Scrolls. But, they didn't survive, and the idea that men alone have the keys to holiness is one that should have died as well. It takes all of us. Even the women, even the children. Especially women, especially children. It takes all of us.

And that's why we have to be so serious about seeing each other as fully human. Jesus has a very wonderful teaching that when we lust after another person, we have already committed adultery with them in our heart. Yes, that means that we are not allowed to objectify each other, even in our minds. It is incumbent upon each of us to govern our thoughts and not make someone else less with our sin against them.

Sometimes we have trouble with having a body. I think some of this trouble goes back to Paul, with his spiritual children and people of the flesh. Now I don't like to blame Paul, because I think Paul is wonderful, but sometimes we have these stale ideas that our body and our minds are separate. That our body can be dirty or sinful but our mind can transcend this state. Jesus's teaching on cutting off your hand if it causes you to sin seems to support this - at a first glance, it seems like Jesus is saying that our body is trying to draw us into trouble and that we'd be better off turning to self-mutilation. But we have to remember: the body and the mind and the spirit are all connected as one, and they are all sanctified by God and subject to our sin. We are in a religion that proclaims the body, we have an incarnate God in Jesus, who comes to us again in the bath of baptism and the meal that we eat at the altar. The body is essential to our

understanding of faith. We believe that the mind, body, spirit are all impacted by sin and that we are also redeemed. Of course if you have a sin that is formed in your mind and made real in your eye or your hand, the hope is for redemption. Always.

We can't lose any of us. And the thing is, we so often see Jesus' teaching for us as something that's just for me. That if we follow Jesus then we can become holy, that the way of Jesus is to make us into holy perfect persons in our own world. But it's not - if we strive for law-following just in our own lives, we turn inward. And even worse, the worst thing we can do with these teachings, is that we can use them to build fences. We all want a God that's gracious to people are exactly as bad as we are, but not to people who are worse. And sometimes we think it's us that gets to decide exactly where that line is, and we use the Bible to decorate the wall we build to keep other people out. But every time we point to a verse and use it as a fence to keep somebody else away from us, God is just laughing on the other side of the fence and blessing that person that we don't choose. It's so aggravating! God is always blessing those terrible sinners, those fleshly people, all those people that are just like me but a little bit worse. God is always trying to bless me, no matter how many walls I put up to keep those terrible people out.

And the thing is, we don't need to worry about building that fence or being 100% perfect in following the laws that we think are most important.

Because that's not why Jesus is giving teaching on the law to the disciples. He wants to make a community of people for the good of the world. So if we focus on becoming perfect ourselves, we are missing the biggest opportunity to love each other and to love the world. We aren't here to be perfect - we already have Jesus for that. We are here to be love. All of us. It's going to take everybody.

And that's why we read Deuteronomy, still. Because when Moses stands at Horeb and gives a book-long speech about the law, it's still relevant to us. Jesus is expanding on the Torah but we have to go back and understand what that community was about, so we can understand what Jesus is trying to create in us.

This week, I got to represent this church at Interfaith Advocacy Day in Olympia, with the Faith Action Network. Now, these are some committed imperfect people, faithful people from many traditions, all gathering in our State capitol to go make some holy trouble. Bishops Kirby and Jake were there, and Aneelah Afzali representing the Muslim community, and Rabbi Ruth Zlotnik from Temple Beth Am. She preached to us and she reminded us that the Torah is full of the commandment over and over to love the stranger as you love yourself.

In Deuteronomy, there are at least 13 places where the law makes provision for the stranger or foreigner in the land. The law is explicit in saying that the stranger should be brought in the gates, and fed, and given a chance to make a living for themselves. It goes so far as to say in Deuteronomy 10 that we are to love the stranger as we love ourselves.

It's in the law. The way of life is to love the stranger, and to provide for everyone out of what God has given us. That's what Rabbi Ruth was telling us, and she told us that it is up to people of every faith to come together to make a sanctuary, to make a *sukkat shalom*, a safe space for the foreigner to come into our land. This is the law's application in the twenty first century.

So when Jesus has his Moses-moment, in the Sermon on the Mount, when he is reiterating that righteousness is through the law, we should hear that the way of life is for everyone - including the stranger. We should hear that reconciliation and care for one another is for our community, but it's also our outward obligation to the world. To be reconciling. To keep each other out of legal trouble. To not lust for another. To keep your word. The good news of Jesus' teaching is that through us it is for the whole world. We can't afford to lose each other.

So here's the invitation for this Valentine's Day: I am delighting that there is a popularly celebrated saint's day, and the reason that this saint is the one we all remember is because Saint Valentine is famous for love. I would not even mind if I died and people remembered me by giving chocolate. I might mind if it is the chalk candy hearts. We have turned this into romantic love, and it is wonderful to celebrate our lovers, but what Jesus is building for us is a community of love that will start with us and the disciples and go out over the whole earth. It is exactly what we need, to be loving and appreciative towards the people who are in our lives regularly, and to practice giving what we receive to others. Because that is exactly the posture that Jesus is inviting us into: look, I will sit with you and give you these teachings, but then you will go out and love the world. So go love your wives and your husbands and your sons and your daughters and your parents and grandparents, and multiply that love in your workplaces, in your schools, in this neighborhood, and in the world. Go be love. And if you have to do it with chalk candy, please pick the one that says "love everybody." Because God gave us a valentine, and it says, "I love you, I love you, I love you. I love everybody."