

August 15, 2021

“Good Advice”

Occasionally, the things we hear stop us in our tracks. For example the day a child responded to someone who was reprimanding her and she said, “Please, don’t yell and tell. Teach me.” It is, of course, so much easier to yell and tell. This experience is ripe for exploring the implications it has for our connection to God.

If you ask the average person what we as brothers and sisters of Jesus believe about God, they will tell you God is one who tells us what to do - who yells at us when we fail - and who is inclined to punish us for failure. God is, in short, the ultimate critical parent.

How sad is that? It is hard as children not to feel the criticism of others - we learn by trial and error. As God’s children we also learn by trial and error. And how frustrating is that? Our children, our family and friends – even co-workers - won’t take our word for it when we give them good advice! And, of course, we struggle to take their advice in turn as well. We all seem to imagine we were born knowing everything we need to know. And how hard it is for us as God’s children to believe there is more to God’s life in us than we have already experienced.

Part of the problem is tied up in the idea of “advice.” Advice is - in our trial and error lives - a mixed bag. Alan Sherman captured this beautifully in his song, “Good Advice.” He sang, *Benjamin Franklin was a charming old man, he was always flying his kite. One night I said, "Benjy, why ain't you out with your kite?" He said, "Because it's raining tonight"*

*I said, "Benjy, sweetie, you go right back out there
And to your kite string, tie a key, This, may shock you, Benjy, my boy
But that's electricity!"*

*And that was good advice, good advice
Good advice costs nothing and it's worth the price
I'll re model you, if you'll only listen to my good advice*

And isn't that the truth? When we have what we are sure is good advice, we feel confident we have made the world a better place. But advice is tricky stuff. We buck at advice given to us because it feels controlling. We aren't excited about people giving us advice, no matter how benevolent the direction in which they send us.

Our text today is too easily confused with advice. Yes, there is direct speech, yes, there is clear direction set and behavior highlighted. But this is not advice - this is a recipe. And the recipe works for us.

We find it hard to hear – “*...no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth...Go ahead and be angry...but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry...*”

And we think, “Who the heck are you to tell me what to do? But this really isn't advice....it is the inside scoop to getting to the place where life is better. This recipe for living together isn't about *control* - it is about *choosing to live in healthy community*. The way we treat one another is a choice we each make - an ingredient in the mix which makes our life together flavorful or bitter. (Go through recipe ingredients here)

“*Say only what helps, each word a gift.*” - “*Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk.*” “*And be kind, one to another - tenderhearted and forgiving one another - even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.*” This is not telling or yelling. This is teaching: Teaching us how we can live well together as God's faithful children. So much better than advice:

*Christopher Columbus was a seaman second class
When I told him that the Indies could be found,
by sailing to the West instead of sailing to the East.
I advised him that I thought the world was round, I really thought so...*

*And then I sent him down to ask good Queen Isabella
To pawn her jewels for all their worth.
Next day he set sail and as everyone knows,
He fell off the edge of the Earth!*

*And that was bad advice, bad advice.
Bad advice is just the same as good advice
Everybody makes occasional mistakes and that was bad advice.*

Advice is shaky - our faith isn't about giving or taking advice but about following recipes for living in love. Our text today ends with: "*God didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.*" Love like that, indeed.

Our life in God and our best efforts are not found in Yell and Tell – but in living together in love. Making choices, choosing paths and valuing one another in ways that grow from and lead to love.

Parts of the Recipe:

Don't Lie - Tell the truth -	Flour
Manage anger -	Salt
Honest Work - Not Stealing -	Baking Powder
Let your words be a gift -	Vanilla
Forgive each other easily -	Peanut Butter
Watch what God does -	Rolled Oats
Embody extravagant love	Chocolate Chips
Practice Honest Work	Eggs
No more Pretense	Butter or Margarine

“Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.”