

Of Weights and Wings

This has been quite a week.

First we had Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warning us that we better go to war with Iran — in order to avoid war with Iran.

He made many of the same arguments that landed us in that never-ending war in Iraq, and we all know how well that turned out.

Well, Mr. Netanyahu had barely finished his last sentence when my favorite State supreme court, those lovable lunks from the land of cotton, were at it again, continuing their tried and failed history of saying not only “no” but “hell no!” when it comes to equal rights for those who don’t happen to be heterosexual white men.

Fifty years ago, it was Alabama Governor George Wallace who defied the federal courts on the human rights imperative of desegregation and a few days ago, there was that State’s entire Supreme Court defying the federal courts on the human rights imperative of allowing same sex folks the right to marry.

So it is no small irony that we have the readings we have today: the 10 commandments given to the freed slaves of the Exodus, followed by Paul’s remarkable discovery of the profound wisdom we discover in being a fool for Christ, followed by Jesus, not meek and mild, but rather the radical preacher who kicks out the cops and bankers and preachers from the holy temple of God.

We begin with the 10 commandments because, after all, it was a 3 ton version of the 10 Commandments that first got nationwide attention for the chief justice of the Alabama supreme court.

You remember, back in the 1990’s, he had a huge granite block carved with them, and plopped it right smack dab in the middle of the supreme court building.

It didn’t weigh a ton, it weighed tons!

Which is how so many folks think of the 10 commandments: as heavy burdens put on us, as finger wagging scolds, as party-poopers, kill joys, and a giant rain on our parade.

But in fact, what we Christians come to see is that the commandments are not weights at all, but they are wings that let us fly. Tom Long.

The old rabbis sometimes look at the first and last parts of the law, like bookends, to get a sense of the core meaning of the whole law.

Look at how it starts and how it ends to get a sense for the whole.

When we look at the first commandment, what we get is: "Love God with all that you are" and when we look at the last one we get: "avoid drooling over your neighbor's stuff."

In other words, make God the only God (so we don't get bogged down with worshipping sure fire failures like Kim Kardashian or the Pentagon or Wall Street) and be at peace with what you have (so we don't spend our lives burning with envy or destructive greed or in lustful pursuit of this or that husband or wife of some other guy or gal).

And when we move from the bookends to the ones in between, commandments 2 through 9, why these just flesh out the bookends; giving us wings that come from living this way.

Living this way, we can go to sleep at night with unlocked doors, because there will be no thieves; we can avoid those ugly scenes when children curse their parents, because we honor our elders; we can live free from murder and mayhem, since we are forbidden to kill, and I can know that the guy next door is looking out for me, especially when I can't look out for myself, because he's not pining for what I have.

We can rest one day a week.

These are the wings that the God who frees us from all kinds of slavery gives to us in these 10 commandments, and if we live them, we find ourselves living lives that indeed fly!

Which gets us back to Mr. Netanyahu and the Alabama supreme court.

The opposite of freedom is fear.

And fear was the gasoline of both of these events of the last week.

Fear Iran will get the bomb and blow up others.

Fear that same sex unions will destroy opposite sex marriage.

And perhaps fear of making friends with long term enemies, fear of those who are different, fear of the unknown.

But if Christ is crucified and raised from the dead, what is there to fear?

While our instinct tells us to avoid danger and to see death as the very worst thing, in Jesus, God defeats death; God invites us NOT to run from danger but to face it; not to run from the stranger, but to embrace her, not to use our best thinking based on power and success, but to surrender all things to the Living God who holds all that is together — now and forever.

This is of course foolishness for smart folks.

For the tough-nosed realist who's seen it all, our faith is pure malarky.

That's Paul's point.

Folks back then weren't much different than folks today.

Everyone knew then, just as everyone knows now, that the way to the top is through hard work, an occasional stab in the back, dog eat dog, because it's down and dirty survival tactics that make the world go round.

But like the mystic Thomas Merton once said: "People spend a lifetime climbing the ladder of success, only to find, when they reach the top, it was leaning against the wrong wall."

So God calls together a community, which is us, to become a sign of how to live life within the covenant of God: meaning — we are called to be the people who go to bed with the door unlocked, we are called to be the people who say no to murder of all kinds: whether it's killing the body with a bullet or killing someone's reputation with a tongue; we are called to be a people who are content with what we have; honoring our elders and refusing all forms of theft.

Yes, our homes may be broken into.

Yes, we may even get beat up, robbed, disrespected or worse.

But we foolish servants of God — when we are true to our mission — become a sign of what God's kingdom looks like; and truth be told, the whole human race is dying for that kingdom.

Every person on earth, I don't care how hard boiled, is dying to be accepted, loved, understood, honored, cared about and cared for.

And we are called to do just that.

First by getting to know ourselves, even our dark sides, so that we can learn to love and accept who we are; and then taking the hard lessons learned in those journeys out, to each other, loving one another as we love ourselves.

This is our life, this is our calling, and with it, perhaps we can even fly!

+amen

