

Clichés can be annoying. One of the things I don't like about them is that they tend to kill conversation. They have a sum-it-all-up way of ending thoughtful discourse. Clichés consists of things that we know to be so true that we don't have to and don't want to hear about them.

Some clichés we learned from our mothers, for example "A stich in time saves nine." I don't knit but I don't have to know how to knit but I understand that to be absolutely true. "Waste not, want not" I do know about and know that it is true. That doesn't make it any less annoying when someone says it to me.

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be:" I fail on both counts, but I know why I should neither borrow nor lend. Yogi Berra has achieved immortality, not because of his tremendous career in baseball but because he is the author of clichés: "When you come to the fork in the road, take it."

"It is better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all." That is of course true but it is a painful truth after a breakup. The great Teddy Roosevelt gave us a few, the most famous of which is, "Speak softly and carry a big stick." TR, as great as he was, was not known for speaking softly, by the way.

Clichés are part of our everyday verbal furnishings, but what about clichés for Christians? We've got our own and they are no less difficult. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" That is true, easy to understand but not easy to do. "It is better to give than receive" yeah, yeah. "Honor thy mother and father" some might say, "You don't know my parents, do you?" "The meek shall inherit the earth" I know some meek people. I question the wisdom of turning the world over to them.

We know these phrases for we have heard them from the cradle through today. They act as a kind of white sound, ambient noise, or religious elevator music. They are vaguely reassuring. We've gotten so used to them we can stop hearing them, or at least pay them little attention.

This brings us to our cliché from this morning's gospel lesson. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

You can easily prepare to turn off now. You know everything there is to know about bread. You know that it is a metaphor. You know that it is a symbol. You know it is the thing we deal with at the Lord's Table. You know that it is the thing that people break. You know that it is a synonym for money and cash. So, there is very little I can tell you about bread so I'm bringing this cliché thing to the limits.

So, let's go to the context in which the line is uttered. This is the classic beginning of Lent text. Jesus is in the wilderness in his long fast and the temptations are starting. Satan creates the situation.

Satan says, 'If you are who you say you are, if you are who you think you are, if you are who people will say you are, command these stones to be turned into bread.' Well, what's wrong with that?

Satan, like most intelligent people, like most of us, really wants to know. We don't like mystery. We don't like incomplete circumstances. We, and Satan, really want to know if this Jesus is really the Son of God. If he isn't, there are others to worship, other places to go, and other important things to do with our time.

Is Jesus really who he says he is? If so, prove it. Show us. Think of how simple and clear things would be for all of us if Jesus had gone on with it and turned the wretched stones into bread. A lot of trouble would have been saved, a lot of scripture would have been saved, a lot of preaching would have been saved, a lot of listening would have been saved if Jesus had simply proven to Satan who he was, once and for all.

Who would not be persuaded by a practical demonstration of power- stones to bread? Remember now, Jesus is on a huge fast, greater than Gandhi's biggest hunger strike. This is a major temptation considering the circumstances.

Jesus was in a vulnerable position at that point. He could prove who he is and have something to eat. So, why not give into the temptation? We know the answer, however. Jesus is not into proof. He knows who he is. He knows who God is. Most importantly, in Matthew's Gospel, he knows who Satan is.

Jesus has the power of knowledge. Jesus does what he does, doesn't do what he doesn't do, based upon Jesus' knowledge of the scriptures. If there was ever an argument for knowledge of the scriptures, this is it. It is his knowledge of the Word of God that saves Jesus from an early and fatal demise.

Jesus shows the unwillingness to exercise visual power unnecessarily. Restraint is enormous power. There is a lesser known cliché that may have begun with this story. "Power concealed is power enhanced; power revealed is power diminished." If Jesus had done the stone to bread trick, he would have been yielding power to Satan.

Now, I hesitate to use this example because of this individual's almost deification around here recently. I will do it anyway because the story fits what I'm trying to say in this sermon. I am not, I repeat I am not in any way comparing him to Jesus. Tom Brady was interviewed in his Montana ski get-a-way soon after the Superbowl by Peter King, senior NFL writer for Sports Illustrated.

King asked Brady about what so many people called last season, the revenge tour. It is the idea that Brady and the Patriots played the season with extra vengeance because of the unjust suspension by the NFL Commissioner whose name I will not utter in this holy place.

Brady responded that he absolutely had no vengeance in his heart this past season. He said, "I will not give my power away to other people by letting my emotions become subjected to what their opinions are. I will not give up my power."

Do you see what he is saying here? Let's say someone called Brady an ugly name. If he responds in kind, he's letting the other person set his agenda. By smiling back and not get caught up in the ugliness, he is keeping his power to be a positive person. "Power concealed is power enhanced; power revealed is power diminished."

I said that I won't compare Brady to Jesus. I will say that Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days. Brady was in the wilderness for 28 days at the beginning of the season... just saying!

I've been with you around three and a half years, now. I think that I might be remembered here for one point I made in a sermon. Actually, I've made it more than once. The reason I say that is that it has been repeated back to me more than anything else I've ever said to you.

It is when I preach on forgiveness. I say that forgiveness is a favor you do for yourself. I say that you don't want the person you are resentful of taking up all that real estate in your heart and mind. You are in dark resentment while the person you are resenting is dancing the night away. Your resentment is yielding power to the other.

Forgive and keep your power.

By retaining his power, Jesus used it to save the world. Tommy retained his power and won the Superbowl. Retain your power and see what you can do. AMEN