

Proper 25 A
St. Matthew 22:34-46
October 29, 2017
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Laying Down the Law

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Lay down the law! Parents do that all the time with their children, and pet owners, imagining their charges think as we do, also "lay down the law."

Young children and pets do what their parents ask them to do as these law and rule-givers lead them, because they understand punishment and reward. Do something that displeases mom or dad, and something you don't want will happen to you. Obey the rules and you will be rewarded with a treat or a bowl of dog food.

Children, at about age seven grow out of this pattern of the carrot or the stick, because at that age they can begin to understand the difference between right and wrong, and they now understand why it is wrong to do bad things, and no longer just because it displeases their parents. At that point, whether they choose to behave or not is another matter. Sociopaths are those individuals who never develop this sense of right and wrong, or empathy for those whom they have harmed.

This raises the question, what is a parent to teach their child about life and the world? We have all struggled with this one. How do you boil down the wisdom you have gained from your own personal experience of this life? And when we want to hand down this vital knowledge, when our kids are in their later teens and early twenties, it would seem as though they are most resistant to listening to their parents. I know I was, and they were pretty gentle about the wisdom they wanted to share with me. My dad would often try to get something through my thick skull, and when it was important, he would underscore it with the phrase, "the men on

the boat would say...” (he was a chief engineer on an ocean going tug boat) I would respond in a mocking tone and say, “yes, but the kids in school say...”

I remember teaching my own son how it was vital to get a college degree to be able to live a happy life later on. He didn't take my oft stated and explained advice, needless to say. I was beside myself with worry about his future. And yet, he proved me wrong. Matt was able to be successful in life without following my advice. It's not that I gave him bad advice. But he figured life out on his own terms, which is often best way to go about doing it.

What do you want for your children when they grow up? What do you think is important to tell them about life? Teaching them to further their education is likely good advice. Teaching them to never stop learning and to be a student of life and love is better advice. Teaching them about God is even better advice. But how do you suppose we should do that?

Now I ask you about the Gospel this morning, and I would suggest, if you would bear with me a moment, imagine what God himself would like to teach to His children about life? Some of us being parents can only imagine how frustrating that must be for God. Think how thick-skulled and pig headed we are about the advice that God has given to us. Why don't we just get it? Is it really that hard to understand?

You see, God is not saying this morning that life is all about rules and laws. Imagine trying to tell your own kids something like that! And if we did, then we would truly be doing an exercise in futility and spreading a lot of hogwash. (I apologize to our pig friends for these metaphors.)

Human parents can be wrong. We can be out of touch with the world as it is now, trying to push wisdom that was true when we were kids, but may no longer be true for our kids. Here are some of those words of wisdom...maybe you have heard yourself giving voice to some of these: Figure out what you want to do in life in high school. Really? Are you kidding me? Are we really old enough at 18 to know what we want to do the rest of our lives? Get married by the time you graduate from college. Do you think we are old enough to pick the person we should be married to the rest of our lives? Go to college. Did that. Majored in Philosophy. Very useful. With that I am able to get a cup of coffee at Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts for the same price as everyone else. Get a degree in what you want to do. Well there you go! Many people work in fields today that are the opposite of what they studied in college or have nothing to do with their degrees, other than college taught them how to think. Get a job with a good company. Is there such a thing as

a good company? What is a good job? I can learn something from each job I take. Buy a house. Millennials no longer want to buy houses, they want to remain fluid and not tied down to a piece of property. Plan to stay with your job and be loyal to that company the rest of your life. Is there any job that provides that security anymore? Buy now, pay later. We know about that one. Bigger is better. Most folks want to buy a smaller home now, both those starting out and those of us who are finishing up. Small is beautiful. Many are now moving into what they call “Tiny homes”. Progress is our most important product. Buy American. Get a new car every 4 or 5 years when they go over 60,000 miles. Who can afford that one as cars start to cost \$50,000.00 on average? Many people have learned to hang onto their older cars and keep them maintained. Change your oil often, every 3,000 miles. (that was one of my dad’s favorites!) Now oil changes are recommended every 10,000 miles! You’ve heard them all and you have also probably taught some of them too. Life changes, and so does human wisdom.

BUT the wisdom of God does not change. God is not wrong in what God teaches us, and God’s teaching and “laws” are essential for leading a good, “happy” life.

Did you notice here, God’s law isn’t negative, that it doesn’t tell you what not to do? God’s law is framed in the positive. God’s law tells you what to do.

When I think of the word “law”, I think of limits set on my behavior, on my freedom, on my will, and I think of crime and punishment. I think of the big stick coming my way for doing wrong. Human laws limit what you can do. But there are no limits on what God wants you to do. You can always do more.

God’s law is simple. Love God. Love your neighbor. Love yourself. Love.

Greater love hath no one than this, that a person lays down his life for their friends. You are my friends if you do what I have commanded you. By this they will know that you are my disciples, that you have love for one another!” This is the great wisdom of living and this leads to a happy and fulfilled life.

The only thing you really need to know about what God wants us to do is this: God wants you and me to be lovers! AMEN