

February 12, 2023 – Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Deutero-nomos = Second Law – Moses' farewell address

At the end of their forty years in the wilderness, just before his death, Moses reminds the people of the lessons they have learned, the blessings of obedience, and the consequences of disobedience.

If you had one more chance to speak to a group of people whom you had been leading for forty years, what would you say?

15-16 - I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.

17-18 - But if your heart turns away and you are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

19 - I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.

Psalm: Psalm 119:1-8

There are twenty-two consonants in the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalm 119 contains 176 verses – eight verses beginning with each of those consonants – in order, and all basically saying the same thing.

Each verse contains some word referring to God's law, such as teaching, decrees, ways, commandments, statutes, etc.

Who would have written a Psalm like that?

Some suggest Ezra, the scribe, who came back from Babylon to recreate the Jewish religious community after the exile.

Ezra 10: 7-9 – They made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, and that if any did not come within three days, all their property should be forfeited, and they themselves banned from the congregation of the exiles. Then all the people assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. All the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain.

Nehemiah 8: 3 – Ezra read from the law facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday.

1 - Happy are they whose way is blameless, who follow the teaching of the LORD!

2 - Happy are they who observe your decrees and seek you with all their hearts.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Human leaders in the church are not to be the focus of the ministry.

2-3 - I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you.

Hebrews 5: 12 – Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food.

1 Peter 2: 2 – Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation.

*It is OK for infants to need milk and not to be able to eat solid food.
But if a grown adult is still not able to eat solid food, something is wrong.*

*Are you at the stage in your spiritual development where you need milk?
Or are you at the stage in your spiritual development where you should be and/or are on solid food?*

Where are you still on milk? Where have you moved on to solid food?

I Corinthians 3: 4-7 - For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

It was very freeing for me as a pastor to realize that God gives the growth. I am called and responsible to be faithful. I am not responsible for and I cannot control the results.

Gospel: Matthew 5:21-37

Because the standards and level of expectations are so high, I believe that Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount not to the crowd but to His disciples.

21-22 - You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgment." But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment.

23-24 - So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

Unresolved issues in my relationships with other people will hinder my relationship with God.

29-30 – If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

Do we take seriously enough the seriousness of sin?