

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Boundaries are your protection"
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World Communion Sunday

When I was a child, I went to public school, like most of you did. And attached to the school buildings was a playground. If your playground was like mine, there were some fences that kept you on the school property. Now it wasn't a prison with razor wire, but it was an attempt to keep the children in bounds, and many of us would go right along the inside of the fence and most of us didn't question why the fence was there. But how you view the fence is how you view your life. Is it there as an inhibitor, being fenced in, or is it there for your protection, keep you away from harm. Such views are important to note and I encourage you to think of how you see boundaries in your lives.

Another area would be how your parents disciplined you. We've had visitors over, and I can see how a young parent chooses to discipline her two and three year olds, set boundaries, say "no" or "don't" or not. How do you remember your being disciplined, at home or at school? Was it fair and warranted, or unfair and over-punitive, or were you not disciplined at all, causing other problems in your life? Your view on being corrected and restrained also greatly colours your perspective on life.

Our views about God also colour our perceptions of life, certainly our spiritual life. Do I see God as a police officer trying to catch me at stuff that I'm not supposed to be doing? Or is God the loving parent who is correcting and disciplining for our best, because left to our own devices our broken and destructive tendencies come out and we hurt ourselves and others. How do you see God, in terms of any corrections or challenges you need in your life? Is God the bad guy or the good guy? Sometimes we would immediately say the good guy, but then act as if he is the bad guy coming after me to arrest me in some way. And if God were to stop me in my tracks, how would I see God doing that, as an abusive law enforcement officer, or as someone who is heading me off from something worse?

The Bible has much teaching on principles that have become the foundation of Western law: the Judeo-Christian ten commandments have been huge in the history of law. Are we seeing the erosion of such influence in this time of history? I would say we are.

But let's get back to God. How do we see God? The book of Job portrays God in an odd way for most of us. To be fair, it is recognized that the book of Job is probably the oldest in the Bible and records a time in history some might call pre-civilization. We find the first two chapters of Job beginning with a dialogue between God and a fallen angel named Satan, which means "the accuser" or "the adversary." God begins to boast about a human named Job, who trusted God through the whole of his life and steadfastly gave his life and all his possessions, all his relationships to God. But Satan, true to his name re accusations, says that the only reason Job trusted God so well is that he has wealth and family and property and animals and all the things a wealthy person of his day would have. So Satan asks God to take away these things to prove that Job would curse God and deny his relationship to God, because it is based on his wealth, possessions, family and friends. God allows Satan to take these things away from Job, but Job does not curse God, in fact he even speaks against his wife's advice to reject God, because life is so hard. He firmly stands his ground of trusting God through all these trials.

And some of us as we read the story, say to ourselves quietly, God, please don't boast about me, to Satan or anyone else, because none of us want to face the losses that Job faced. But we all do face our losses and Job helps us make the right choice. That's why this is a good book. We even see God allowing the devil to take away Job's health for a season, afflicting him or allowing him to be afflicted with a terrible skin disease, where he is scraping himself with a piece of a clay pot and the pain level seems to be horrific. But even in this circumstance, Job does not deny God. He seems to get even deeper spiritual insight, such as "naked I have come into this life and so shall I depart it, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Now Job does charge God with making this or allowing this suffering to happen, and he tries to state the injustice of it all. His friends differ with him, and try to say it is hidden sin that is causing these problems. But life is not that simple and straightforward. In the end, God vindicates Job and although he reminds Job that he is God and Job is the creature, he basically says Job was right in what he was doing and saying and his friends were not.

What do we make of all this? God places boundaries in our lives and we are to trust God no matter what we go through. This is not the spirit of the age in which we live. In this age, our lives are all about self definition, doing and being what I want to do and be (period). Here's the problem with that

point of view: each choir member could say they wanted to do their own thing and say they have the right to do what they want. And yes, they do have that right. But then what happens to a choral piece, if several are singing other songs? There is cacophony, noise instead of harmony and unity...even if it is only one that chooses that self-determined path.

Climbing those fences at school produced more than one broken bone and dashed hopes for more fun. Smoking out on the railroad tracks behind my high school, no matter what they were smoking, didn't bring more freedom and fun into their lives, usually it brought deeper problems.

Now Jesus is asked about marriage. He is asked about divorce. Is he trying to be hard nosed or an abusive cop, when he answers the way he does? No, he is trying to say that divorce is not the answer to all relationship break downs. He says that the little children will be affected, right after he talks about divorce. I think he is right that the children are more profoundly affected than we currently know. He urges whoever listens to not inhibit the little children to come to him. Which is another reason we will be opening the Lord's Table not today but probably at our next communion to the children.

Meanwhile, we continue as a society to go against what God has set up throughout history. We go against traditional marriage, saying that gender is no longer a boundary. We do not know the implications yet of what this will do to families, where there is only one sex modeling and mentoring. We know it is not God's original intention. We also know that our society has gone against the idea that there are only two genders, male and female. Now we say there are male and female heterosexuals, male and female homosexuals, male and female transsexuals, male and female bisexuals, male and females who consider themselves neither male nor female, but neutral and there may be other categories, indicated by the word "queer," but by my count that is ten genders. What will agreeing with this gender self-definition do to our society? What does God think of all this? Some are bold enough to say that God has made them this way. And if this is true, then what do we say to the pedophile or the child pornographer who says the same, that God has made them this way, or that it is in the DNA? Are there any boundaries left any more? And why should there be any boundaries at all? I understand the concepts of mutuality, and consent. But as you know, these are currently being tested in the courts as parties disagree on what they mean. There was even the strange account of two sisters in their 80s on

CBC saying that if they were married, i.e. having sex together, they would receive benefits and be able to share economic and tax benefits, but because they are not a homosexual couple, they cannot receive these benefits.

This month the Presbyterian Church will coming out with a study guide on human sexuality. It is an awkward subject for most of us. Some, perhaps many of you, will disagree with our Church's current stand of holding to traditional marriage, even as this position is at odds with Canada's federal laws, or at least at odds with Canada's human rights tribunals. We will see what happens in this year of study. It is not something many of us look forward to pursuing, but we shall do so, at the urging of our church's national general assembly. I trust you will take part, as you are able.

Meanwhile we come to the Table together. There are boundaries for coming to the Lord's Table. You are welcome, but you are welcome if you desire to trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, as you trust Him for your life and health, for your relationships and property. If you do not wish to trust Him or if you do not believe in him as the person presented in Scripture, the Son of God who leads us to the heavenly Father, the One who gave his life as an atonement for our sins, if you do not believe in him, then we urge you to refrain from this meal, because if you come unbelieving, the Scripture says in 1 Cor. 11:27ff the unbeliever eats and drinks judgment on themselves. But if you come just as you are, trusting Him and asking him to help you believe more deeply, then you are welcome. We don't often say the boundaries of the Table. But you need to know where you are in relationship to Christ. This is his Table, not mine, not this congregations, not even the Presbyterian Church in Canada's table, it is the Table of the Lord. Come to him.

Let us pray.