

Luke 11:1-13
July 24, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

OK – riddle time. What can you sit on, sleep on, and brush your teeth with?
A chair, a bed, and a toothbrush.

Simple, right? Did everyone try to make it more difficult?

My ordination bishop, the bishop I served with in Nebraska for five years, had a few favorite catch phrases for pastors. Among the ones he liked to repeat quite often was from the movie “A League of their Own.”

In the movie, Dorothy, played by Gina Davis, has decided to call it quits. She explains that it has just gotten too hard with her husband at war and her sister’s competitiveness. The coach, played by Tom Hanks, Jimmy Dugan says, “If it were easy, everyone would do it. Hard is what makes it great.”

Hard is what makes it great. That might be true of baseball and pastoral ministry at times, but it should not be true of Christianity.

Christianity is not meant to be hard, because everyone should do it, or be a part of it. Everyone should trust that God is on their side and loves them completely. That should not be a hard thing, but people like to make things hard. Even things that are supposed to be super simple, people like to make difficult – for other people anyway.

And that is exactly what Jesus and Paul come up against in our texts today.

People have always been trying to make religion difficult, including Christianity. They always want to put conditions on our relationship with God, to make it hard, but it’s not hard and there are no conditions. God does all of the work for us.

God creates us, comes to us in the flesh, places the gift of forgiveness right in our hands, closes our fingers around his love, and then let’s us loose into the world with the promise of eternal life. And it’s not dependent on us doing anything at all, aside from being open to the relationship.

Faith is easy. It is a gift. A totally free gift that we don’t have to do anything to receive. We can’t earn it and it cannot be taken away from us.

In Colossae, there was a group of people who believed that you must be Jewish before you can be Christian, which meant that you had to be circumcised, if you were a man, and you had to follow all of the kosher laws male or female.

They were taking God's free gift and putting a price tag on it. Faith was something you had to earn the right to, like paying for your Costco membership so you can get the \$1.50 hotdog and pop, which you don't actually have to do.

They were totally going against Jesus' teachings that he has come for absolutely everyone, including the Gentiles, just as we are. We don't have to make ourselves "right" or have someone else make us "right" in order to be in a relationship with God. God has already made us "right" and God wants to be in a relationship with us just as we are.

But, here is this group in Colossae that is making it hard, and hard is not making it great. It's making it horrible. They were forcing things upon others that they weren't even doing themselves, such as following all of the kosher laws.

Christianity is absolutely not supposed to be difficult. It's supposed to be easy so that everyone can be a part of the beloved community.

People need only hear the good news of God's love for them and then trust in it. They don't even need to believe it necessarily. All they need do is trust that God is with them and for them.

The real work comes on the side for those who already trust God's love, and it's not really a work, but good news that we can't help but share. Faith comes from hearing and people need to hear the good news, and it's important to remember that it is not in a consumerism type of way. We aren't selling God. We are merely telling people about a gift they already have – like finding a Starbucks card in your pocket that you didn't know was there. It's already yours.

And it helps for us to hear the good news regularly as well so that we are encouraged to share it in the world, because the ways of the culture that surrounds us are very pervasive, as we see with Jesus and his first disciples in the text from Luke today.

To make sense of the first part of Luke 11, we need to know what happened in Luke 5:33. Earlier in the Gospel, the Sadducees and Pharisees were complaining that Jesus disciples eat and drink while John's disciples fasted and prayed.

Jesus explains that John's disciples were preparing the way, but now God is with them so his disciples eat and drink.

But, even his own disciples don't get the gift that is sitting right there with them. They don't realize God is right there in relationship with them. So, they want to be like John's disciples. John's disciples were doing what society expected disciples to be doing, as we hear the Pharisees and Sadducees commending John's followers.

Jesus' own disciples think Jesus is making it too easy on them. Surely we have to do something else, right? This is way too easy.

And I can hear the exasperation in Jesus voice. "You still don't get it. Fine, I'll teach you to pray, even though I'm sitting right here in front of you and we've been holding conversations regularly, which is prayer.

But here's what you need to know. When you pray – first acknowledge that God is God and you are not. Keep God's name holy by remembering who you are talking to, your daddy in heaven who loves you completely. So, only use God's name in loving ways, never in curses or hate, and remember that you are just a babe in God's embrace.

Next, remember that God's kingdom is here among us and we take it with us wherever we go.

Remember that God has always provided everything you need and God always will.

Remember that you are already in a right relationship with God, so go and forgive others. That's how you live God's kingdom here and now.

And always remember that you are a beloved child of God no matter what anyone else says. Again – you cannot earn or destroy God's love. It's yours, and it's easy, so don't let anyone make you think that it is hard, because that is a trial you do not need to be a part of. You are a beloved child of God. Period. End of sentence."

Prayer is being in a relationship with God and it's not hard. It already exists. The phone line is already open and can be used at any time and all the time. There are no requirements, you don't have to stick a quarter in the slot, because it's a relationship not a privilege.

You are already in a relationship with God and it cannot be earned or terminated. It's that simple, so don't make it hard. And if you ever get to the point that it feels hard, simply call on the Holy Spirit. You will never be denied the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit who unites us with God and give us faith to trust God in all circumstances.

God wants to be in a relationship with you – clearly – that's why you were made, that's why Jesus came, and that's why the Holy Spirit is in, with, and among us.

It's not hard, because God is doing all of the work and giving us the most precious gifts – our selves, our time, our possessions, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, and the Holy Spirit. God gives it all to us. It's ours.

Being a Christian is easy so that everyone can be a Christian. It's a gift. And because our cups are overflowing, we share that gift with others in our words and actions.

We have confession and forgiveness each Sunday, because we forget that our cup is already overflowing, but we want to hoard what we have. Confession and forgiveness regularly reminds us to stop making it hard – for us and for others – because it's not.

So, don't forget to kiss – KISS – Keep it Simple Stupid. If you make the good news complicated, it's no longer good news. And if someone cannot hear the good news, that's when you should be persistent, but just be sure you're not making things complicated.

Hard is not what makes Christianity great. What makes Christianity great is that it is a gift, and there is nothing hard about receiving a true gift – a gift that has no strings attached. It's really easy.

I wonder what would happen if we went out on the streets with a Luke 11:10 sign. God wants to be known by you! It's not a curse, but an invitation, and it is good news, because it's easy.

God is sitting right here wanting to be relationship.

When we ask God - Is anyone sitting here? The answer from God is always - Yes – you are. And the relationship is fully realized.

If it were easy, everyone would do it. And, it is.

Thanks be to God. Amen.