

Restoring Your Faith

By Josette Keelor, 17 Nov 2019

The 23rd Sunday after Pentecost:: Isaiah 65:17-25, Canticle 9, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13, Luke 21:5-19

Today's readings are about trusting in God to help us endure the adversity we'll go through in our lives while trying to follow God's will. This can mean standing against our friends, our family, and our society.

Luke tells us that by following Jesus, we will be betrayed by everyone we know and love.

You will be hated by all because of His name, Luke tells us. "But not a hair on your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls."

Similarly, in the epistle, Paul writes a warning to keep away from believers who live in idleness, who want things for free without working for them.

"For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us," he writes, referring to the apostles.

In giving this a modern take, I tried to think what we might do today in the name of God (or in the name of good) that would pretty much guarantee us instant annoyance—even hatred—from others. And with the exception of announcing our political beliefs, I arrived at driving the speed limit.

If you drive the speed limit, you will anger anyone driving behind you. Guaranteed. Especially coming down the mountain here or driving along 340 in Clarke County.

And yet, driving the speed limit is following the rules. It's being a safe driver—protecting people in the car with you and people on the road. It's just a small example, but outside of politics, it was the biggest example I could think of that was most likely to elicit ill will from others. Not *because* you're following the rules, but because they don't *want* to follow the rules.

They are some of the modern-day hypocrites.

Hypocrites who think they're good people and are following God's will are specific about their interests. They want to know who's out there saving babies, who's out there saving animals, who's donating all their money to charity, who's building Habitat houses in their spare time or volunteering in a free clinic.

Who's out there doing everything that the hypocrites don't do so that they can say, "Oh, wow, this person has restored my faith in humanity." This phrase has become one of my pet peeves, because it seems to do the opposite of what it intends. It's meant as praise for the person who did the good deed. But what it does instead is criticize everyone else.

Worst of all, the phrase doesn't result in any changed behavior. The people who say this then do... nothing. They just go about their business, driving above the speed limit and being a danger to others until the next time they hear about someone saving animals, and then they'll repeat themselves: You see, there are still good people left in this world.

They are not going to be changed by this. The modern-day hypocrites are not about to go out there and start saving animals, they're just going to share this story and then move on with their lives.

There's nothing inherently wrong with sharing the story and moving on. What *is* wrong is that they praise someone for doing something good that they agree with and then belittle someone else for doing a good thing that annoys them. Both do-gooders are trying to follow God's word, yet one person gets high praise and the other person gets the finger, because they're a rule follower and nobody wants to follow the rules.

Many of the hypocrites were taught these things from childhood, encouraged by friends or by classmates to break the rules, to push boundaries, to see what they could get away with, sometimes to great extremes. This can be anything from rebelling against parents or refusing to go to church to stealing and hurting people, whether physically or emotionally or both. We're all encouraged to break all the Commandments at some point, and we might convince ourselves we deserve things that aren't ours, and it's OK to take them.

What if at the vending machine, you put in a dollar for a Snickers, and the vending machine gives you two. By luck you were rewarded with something that you didn't pay for. Do you take both, because all's fair in free vending machine candy?

What if you find money on the floor at 7-Eleven? Would you try to find the owner, or decide, hey, free money?

These are questions that rule-followers might ask themselves, because each of these cases is a moral dilemma for them, and should be. If you're trying to follow Jesus's will, if you claim to be someone who's following God's will, you should be asking yourself what to do when moral dilemmas happen, or else you won't be following God's will. Thankfully, based on the stories we hear about people who return lost wallets or other lost items, there are a lot of good people out there. And that's enough reason to have continued faith in humanity, rather than temporary, fleeting, easily lost faith.

When people say that someone has suddenly restored their faith in humanity, they are seriously exaggerating. Unless they have never known a kind word or action from anyone, then I can't imagine how they could have lost their faith in humanity enough to say that this one thing that happened has restored their faith. In humanity.

Anne Frank wrote in her diary that after everything she had witnessed over three years living in an attic hiding from Nazis, that "In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart..."

"I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever approaching thunder, which will destroy us too, I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again." – from the *Diary of a Young Girl*, 1947

Luke says that following Jesus will put us at odds with everyone in our life. Whatever side of the divide you're on, whether you're pro-life and are fighting for the lives of the unborn, or whether you believe that nobody should be denied medical care because they can't afford it—whatever personal crusade you take up because of your belief in God, you are putting yourself at odds with an enormous number of people who will be quick to judge and think you are against everything they believe.

"Be prepared" I think is what Luke is saying.

Every decision you make has a potentially life-changing consequence, whether for you or for someone else. You get through one decision and then you have another. If you decide to drive the speed limit, and someone passes you and gives you the finger, then you have the choice of being angry about it, or not. If we're choosing to follow Jesus, then we'll need to be prepared for a lot of battles.

But after all that, Luke tells us, "you will gain your souls." And that is an extraordinary and kind of mindboggling result.

I feel like Luke is asking a lot of me. I feel like Jesus is asking a lot of us. And He is. It's not easy to be good. People want to revere the good person. To put that person on a pedestal. But putting someone on a pedestal is to doom them to universal criticism, universal hatred, because people either can't relate to someone they feel is too perfect, or they're waiting for them to fail. They view such people as inhuman. And that is what

Jesus is asking of us. Not to be inhuman but to be someone that society views as different, because being good is not easy. Following the rules is not easy.

Maybe we're in a hurry. Maybe we bend the rules just a little and say, "Oh it's OK if I drive 65 in a 55, I mean the cops aren't going to pull me over. As long as you're going less than 10 over the speed limit, they know that everyone's gonna do that, and if everyone's doing it, then you're not going to stand out anyway. Everyone does it, right?"

The problem is that bending one rule makes it so much easier to bend other rules. Maybe you know texting and driving is wrong, but you think, "I'll just glance at my phone for a second."

Maybe you drive closer to the vehicle in front of you, closer than the six car lengths that are recommended when you're driving 60 mph, and you think, "Eh, four car lengths, what's wrong with that? Three car lengths, who cares? Everybody does it, nothing's happened to me so far. And then you're on the interstate, and somebody has to break suddenly, because there's a car pulled over on the side, and you can't stop in time, because you didn't give enough distance. Or you *can* stop in time, but the guy behind you can't, because he's not following the rules either, and he crashes into you, pushing you into the next car, because you were driving too close.

Following Jesus is not easy, and each of us needs to decide what we believe, what we want, who we want to be. Do we want to be people who bend the rules? Do we want to be people who are so jaded by all the bad things we see that we can't see the good anymore, until something comes along that kind of jars us out of our stupor, and we say, "Oh, that restores my faith in humanity!"—and then proceed to do nothing?

People like that don't know what faith means. What does it mean to have faith in humanity or not to have faith in humanity?

I don't know how anyone who has faith in anything can say they don't have faith in humanity. Because humanity is everything. It's everything on earth, it's everything that matters. Humanity is everything we believe, everything we do and see, it's how we treat the earth, how we treat animals, how we treat each other.

We relate to God through our humanity. He gave us that. To lose faith in humanity is to lose faith in God, because it's losing faith in His gift of life. It's losing faith in His vision and perhaps, saddest of all, if there's anything sadder than losing faith in God when you're a believer, or when you think you are, is losing faith in yourself.

If you've lost faith in humanity, you have lost faith in yourself, because you are a part of humanity and you can make all the difference in your life. You have the power to change everything—everything that is happening in your life, everything you see and do. Every word you speak, every person you have an experience with, every animal, every *thing*, and of course, God.

You have that impact on your life. You are the *only* one who has that impact on your life.

If you've lost faith in humanity, then you need to restore your faith.