

“Responsibility” Is Not A Dirty Word

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 [Jeremiah 1: 4-10: Luke 10: 25-28]

August 19, 2018
 Cornwall, ON

While visiting with a lady a few days ago, she told me, *Nobody told me that when I got married I would have to cook three meals a day for others for the rest of my life. Nobody even gave me a cookbook. I had three choices: we could eat in restaurants, eat with our parents or we could both do the cooking. We quickly learned that we needed to compromise, and compromise we did.*

Compromise, is a good word and its dictionary meaning is wonderful. But can we compromise when it comes to our faith? To think of compromising our faith, what does that mean?

We might begin by asking ourselves, whose responsibility is it for the choice of church in which we practice and follow our faith? Initially, I believe, we are born into the faith of our parents. The doctrines with which we are raised become our comfort zones. They are the standards by which we measure all our congregations and denominations.

We might then set to wondering, should we give our children freedom to “shop around” for a church of their choice? If so, when? The day I was baptized nobody told my mother or father that I would not one day choose to worship in their denomination. And no one told them that if one of their children did decide to go elsewhere to worship, that it wouldn’t be their “fault.” That it is with their blessing for some of the family is to their credit.

The baptismal question to the congregation is: *DO YOU, ON BEHALF OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST PROMISE TO GUIDE AND NURTURE [NAME] BY WORD AND DEED, WITH LOVE AND IN PRAYER, ENCOURAGING HIM/HER TO BE A FAITHFUL MEMBER OF THIS CHURCH?* The expected and accepted answer in the liturgy has always been and up to now has been the corporate response, *WE DO!*

If you have observed, it is not a coincidence the choice of language in the liturgy is similar to the wedding vows, the vows of confirmation, the vows of ordination, installation etc. In considering this we shouldn’t kid ourselves. These are real words for a real commitment. They are the words of our personal commitment. We publicly and before God promise to do our best to encourage the child in the faith for life. We are asked if we will accept this responsibility. Therefore, we need to consider that perhaps we ought not to open our mouths if we as practicing Christians do not mean it or do not intend to follow through. With the child’s parents, we promise to do our best to encourage the child to grow up in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ so that they will want to attend church regularly to praise God for all the blessings of this life and the eternal life that is to come. So how are we to accomplish this? The only way I know is by loving the children when they are good and when they are not so good. And also by allowing God to love us when we are good and when we are not so good. This is not

always easy. I know many of you have been raised with the phrase, *As long as you are living under my roof, you will have to live by my rules!* The strange thing is that we neglect to teach our children and remember in our own spiritual application, even God's house has rules, ten of them. How far to the left or to the right can we stretch them and still live under God's roof? How much can we compromise on the rules and still be faithful to God?

Jesus Christ is present in every Christian church. Yet many members of the congregation take it upon themselves to measure the worshipper's worth. The line of acceptance may or may not be visible to the naked eye, but the heart knows who is no longer made to feel welcome in our church. Those of a different faith? Those of a different denomination? Those afflicted with a disease like, alcoholism or drugs? Those who are divorced, unemployed, or gay? Those who walked away, or who have never attended? The sinner? What is our line in the sand of acceptance?

Have you ever thought of it this way, does Jesus have a comfort zone? Maybe. Did He not draw a line in the sand? After the line was drawn, on which side was He standing? And, who was beside Him? For whom did Jesus walk on water? To whom did Jesus turn to on the cross and say, *TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE?* With whom did Jesus share the meal of multiplied leftovers?

We need to remember that we are all loved and were even before we were conceived. We need to intentionally and humbly remember the incredibly loving line of Jeremiah: *BEFORE YOU WERE BORN I CONSECRATED YOU.*

Jesus taught and says to us, *LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD ... AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF.* The first one seems easy enough and the second takes a bit of stretching. Quite a bit! Can we do it? Can we love our neighbors as ourselves? Will God give us the grace? Martin Luther said: *DOUBTING THE SUPPLY OF GOD'S GRACE IS LIKE A SPARROW WONDERING IF THE SKY IS BIG ENOUGH TO FLY IN.*

Who is in our wills? All of our children? Some of our children? None of our children? Who is in God's will? Sometimes we act as if we've already inherited God's kingdom and we aren't about to share it. At least, not at the moment. Not until we are good and ready. The day will come whether we like it or not, when somebody, somewhere will share his or her church or their faith with our children. Let us with prayerful commitment, do our best to remember that when we are given the opportunity to greet and welcome strangers into our congregation and when we make promises at the Sacrament of Baptism, it is up to us to follow through. Otherwise there is no telling whose hands will take up this responsibility and lead them, perhaps down another path, into a cult, into another form of religion, away from the Church and away from Christ. Amen.