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A few weeks ago I spoke about Tent Rules, recalling how God has offered us rules to live by, not as restrictions, but as a fence to keep us safe and to help us get along with one another. My words seemed to connect to many of you, for I heard so many positive comments that Sunday. There's something about guidelines that we humans seem to need. I've noticed that younger children especially need rules and structure in order to thrive, though many times they try to push against all the boundaries. I once had some foster children who seemed to challenge every boundary set in our family, and I soon realized that they tested the boundaries to see if they were really safe, if we would continue to love and accept them even when they broke the rules.

I'll never forget the time the two older girls decided to leave the house when it was nearly time for supper. We had a practice of eating together for the evening meal, but they decided to see what would happen if they violated that practice.

Once they returned, I think they were expecting punishment or no food. Instead I explained that

Being Human
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Rev. Dr. Douglas Cripe
Central Christian Church, Elkhart & First Christian Church, Mishawaka

eating together offered an opportunity to engage in conversation and hear about their day at school and to give thanks for the blessings God has provided. They never walked out an evening meal again.

I wonder if Jesus had encountered those who asked about rules, such as the Ten Commandments, for in Matthew's Gospel, he says six times, "You have heard it said...", repeats a Commandment, and expands the teaching.

For example, I think most of us agree that killing another person is something to avoid, but Jesus expanded it by saying, "you have heard it was said, do not murder, but I say, don't even get angry at a person or call someone stupid. If you recall being angry at someone while preparing to give an offering in worship, immediately abandon your offering and make things right with the person."

We may not have killed anyone, but has anyone ever been angry? I think Jesus was talking about us.

Another example, "Don't get in bed with someone else's spouse, but I say, even if you just think about it, you're still in trouble. If you look at someone inappropriately, tear out your eye.

Matthew 5:21-26, 33-37

Anyone ever look at someone in a disrespectful way? I think Jesus was still talking about us. We humans often want something or someone that does not belong to us. Although we may not literally cut out our eyes, one writer suggested, “anything that causes us to objectify or commodify others must be cut away and discarded.”¹ It’s good to cut out of our lives anything that turns people into objects.

A third example—this one in regard to making oaths. Instead of swearing an oath, let your yes be yes and your no be no. As one writer noted:

Instead of repeating the command, “You shall not swear falsely,” [Jesus] says, “Do not swear at all” (v. 33). Even though taking an oath is common, it reflects a moral defect. For whenever a person swears, he or she is saying in effect, “I may have lied on other occasions, but in this instance, I swear I’m telling the truth.”²

Ever say something untrue or partially true? I think Jesus was still talking about us.

Even though Jesus was filled with as much God as possible in human form, Jesus was also human.

He knew what it was like for us to be human—fallible, flawed, imperfect, and full of mistakes. Yes, we might strive to keep the Ten Commandments, but that may not change how we treat one another all the time. Being human is about learning to love one another even with our imperfections.

In the last instance of Jesus expanding God’s teachings, he said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Being human is about offering forgiveness, something that’s not always easy to do, especially if you’ve ever wondered how to forgive someone who’s not really all that sorry and doesn’t feel like talking about it.

Robert Enright, a professor of education psychology at the University of Wisconsin Madison and a leader in the scientific study of forgiveness, and Laura Davis, the author of several books about estrangement and reconciliation [offer some ideas]. ... [They] say that forgiving someone who is unrepentant is absolutely possible. ...

In some ways, it’s easier to define forgiveness by what it isn’t. “Forgiveness is not excusing what the other

did; that behavior was wrong, is wrong, and will always be wrong,” Enright says.

Both Enright and Davis say that forgiveness exists separately from reconciliation, and also from accountability — which is why forgiving someone doesn’t require an apology or even their participation. “Reconciliation is a negotiation strategy between two or more people trying to make their way back together to mutual trust,” explains Enright, whereas forgiveness is a one-way endeavor. Put another way: Forgiveness might be a step on the path to reconciliation, but you don’t have to traverse the full route if you’d prefer not to.³

That’s being human. Striving to offer forgiveness even if the other person is not interested, hoping that reconciliation could happen down the road. Offering forgiveness isn’t easy, but we strive to continue practicing it and teach one another about the journey of forgiveness, for being human means reflecting God’s grace and offering forgiveness.

It’s what a Sunday school teacher was teaching her grade school class—that we all need God’s forgiveness. After the story she asked one of the girls, “When is a time you might need God’s forgiveness?”

Noticeably perplexed, the girl was reassured by the teacher’s son, who whispered, “It’s okay, you don’t have to tell her.”

Then the boy looked his mother straight in the eye and sternly said, “We don’t have to tell you our problems. This isn’t The Oprah Winfrey Show!”⁴

Like the young girl, we may feel reluctant to talk about those times we need forgiveness. We might feel a bit embarrassed about our human nature and our vulnerability and our tendency to forget the rules. That’s just being human. Being human, however, also means we have the capacity to accept what God offers us each moment—forgiveness, grace, the chance to try again and to offer it to one another. That’s being human.

¹ Christopher T. Holmes, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship*, Year A, Volume 1.

² HomileticsOnline.com, 2/12/17.

³ HomileticsOnline.com. 2/12/23.

⁴ Hodgkin, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking* (p. 663). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #630.