Opinion
Spirituality



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Sunday's Gospel is familiar: Be prepared for you do not know the time when God's kin-dom is here. I have to admit, I often misassociate this passage with getting caught with my proverbial hand in the cookie jar.

So I decided to pray deeper with this passage. Upon rereading and reconsidering it, I am reminded of just how masterful Jesus was and is at offering daily instruction. He exposes a narrow, not wide gap between theory and practice, thought and action, words and deeds. To put everything Jesus has to tell us into context, the author of the Gospel of Luke begins with: "Meanwhile, so many people were crowding together that they were trampling one another underfoot. He began to speak, first to his disciples, 'Beware of the leaven — that is, the hypocrisy — of Pharisees.' "

Simply put, Jesus gently calls us to behave in ways that are pleasing to God and one another *right now*. He speaks to everyone, and he first speaks to his disciples. This catches my attention as a minister. I am never excluded from his instruction, no matter how devoted I consider myself to be. I must remain open, willing, able to listen, even when I am in a situation where I do not agree with how other people around me are engaging in the moment.

This requires intentionally retraining my human brain to pause and resist judgment. Once I pause, I can hear Jesus calling us into the kin-dom of love and peace by holding up a mirror so that we may reflect on our own actions and adjust accordingly. When I contemplate the phrase, "Beware of the leaven," my mind drifts to these string of words: "Beware of the leaven that is, hypocrisy ... beware it may just be a little thing ... be aware of hypocrisy ..."

I imagine Jesus saying to me: "So, you've come all this way to listen to my teachings on nonviolence and love, but you find yourself literally stepping on people and judging them along the way just to get closer to me."

I reflect on how I have managed to ignore, reject, disqualify, push away people who may be "getting in my way" or disturbing my peaceful, happy, joyful, seeking life. My hypocritical acts begin to plague me.

I have justified it in the past. "We'll, I can't do everything. And besides, there are people who are trained to work better with migrants crossing the border." Or,

"Health care insurance really widens the gap between richer and poorer people, but what can I do to improve this? My health insurance requires too much paperwork. I'll get to this later." Or, "I've been meaning to get more involved with dismantling mass incarceration. I've just been so busy."

Yet, many people's life and dignity require my attention, my care, my compassion.

I reflect on how my own public identity may conflict with these actions that injure others. It does not matter if my actions are intentional or not. Injury is injury; suffering is suffering.

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I spend time considering how who I understand myself to be is challenged by the contradiction these choices determine for me.

Jesus is not trying to shame me. And of course, I cannot and should not do everything. But, I must commit myself to making strides toward eradicating this life of malice, hyperbole and blissfulness.

I remind myself that I am eager to listen to Jesus for tips on how exactly I can grow to become a better person for others and myself. Jesus continues with this beautiful sentiment: "Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom."

This is how our reading begins. I allow the words "Do not be afraid any longer" to fill my being. Suddenly, I hear the shock of this passage: "Your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom."

I stay here.

Really?! God is pleased? God is pleased to give me the kingdom?

I try to understand this. I continue to turn to Jesus for assurance and clarity. He gently nods his head to acknowledge my turn to him and continues with his instruction to all of us. "Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy.

"For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."

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