

October 13, 2013

A Sermon Preached by
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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF DELRAY BEACH

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The Ten Commandments

7: Learning to Blush

Exodus 20:14

Will You Pray With Me?

Gracious God, as we prepare to hear Your Holy Word, we ask that we may receive the wisdom to hear rightly and the heart to understand compassionately. Make us mindful that we all are broken people who stand in the need for Your forgiveness. In the certain Name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Few who lived in Florida at the time will soon forget Hurricane Andrew of August, 1992. A class five hurricane, the most forceful and destructive hurricane class, destroyed completely over 25,000 homes and caused significant damage to another 101,000 homes in South Florida.

The day after the destruction, a local news crew was dispatched to a community where every home was completely destroyed, many leaving only the concrete foundation as evidence that a home was ever present on a particular site. Every home gone, that is, except one that sustained only minor damage. The owner of that home was in the front yard cleaning the debris left behind by the storm. The local news reporter approached him

with a mike and a television camera. “Why is it that your house is the only one that stood against the force of the hurricane? Why is your house the only one left standing?”

This homeowner responded with considerable humility that he had built the house himself. “I built this home according to Florida State Building Code. When the code called for 2x6 roof trusses, I used 2x6 roof trusses. I was told that a house built according to code would stand against a hurricane. I built according to the code and the house stood. I guess no one else around me followed the code.”

Friends, what is true of the state’s building code is equally true of God’s code for building strong homes and strong families. When we follow God’s code for building a strong home and a strong family, there is strength to face the storms of life that inevitably come.

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Together we are exploring God's building code known to the church as the Ten Commandments. These Ten Commandments are given to God's people to direct their steps in a manner that strengthens them in the storms of life. This week we hear the seventh commandment, do not commit adultery. Simply, this commandment speaks to God's commitment to strong families and God's desire that no one experience the deep brokenness that follows the betrayal of marriage vows.

In the earliest pages of our Bible, in the Book of Genesis, God creates man and woman and brings them together in a marriage-like relationship. God purposefully created one for the other that together they become as one. Do you see what God is doing? The union of two people becomes integral to God's plan for structuring a world that holds together even in the greatest storm. This is God's building code for protecting us from the devastation of the severest storms.

May I share with you that I have seen the deep brokenness of lives that have failed to follow this building code, do not commit adultery. Many of you have seen it as well. Perhaps you have experienced the betrayal of your own marriage vows to another or have seen this betrayal in your larger family. Every time someone confesses to me their own betrayal of their marriage vows, it breaks me. My heart is broken

for them and for their spouse. The road that lies before them will be a difficult and painful one. It is a path that God wished for each of us to avoid by giving us this commandment.

There is a pastor who I love very much – I deeply admire him and he has positively influenced my own ministry. Some years ago, I learned that he betrayed his own marriage vows. When I heard the news, I physically could not work the remainder of the day. I went alone to a nearby park and cried for most of the afternoon. Please understand that I love him deeply and admired the wider impact his ministry had upon the larger church. Everything would change now. I was certain that he would lose his church, that his wife was now wounded beyond anything I could imagine and that his influence upon the larger church would be diminished. Just as important, I knew my friend was embarrassed and would be hurting.

If you have betrayed your marriage vows or you have personally been hurt by a betrayal, the road before you is a difficult one. It is a road I have not personally traveled. I will not minimize your pain by suggesting that I understand your pain. I do not. I do know that it is a painful journey that stretches out in front of you and for that I am deeply sorry.

The marvelous preacher of the last century, Henry Sloane Coffin once said from his pulpit, the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, that people who have broken their marriage vows are often more sinned against than is their own sin.

What I do know is what the Bible teaches should be our response – the response of the church to both the betrayer and the betrayed. We are not to point fingers and cast further shame and hurt. The marvelous preacher of the last century, Henry Sloane Coffin once said from his pulpit, the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, that people who have broken their marriage vows are often more sinned against than is their own sin. I know that is debatable, particularly if you are the person harmed by betrayal. But the point he makes remains, the Bible teaches that we are not to multiply the pain by casting our judgment.

The authority for this comes from John's Gospel, the eighth chapter. Here, in the beginning of this chapter, is a story of a woman who is caught in adultery. There is no question of her guilt. She is forcefully brought before Jesus by those who caught her and demands are made upon Jesus for a sentence for her guilt. As I mentioned earlier, I have not traveled the path she has traveled. I can not know

everything that is racing through her mind. But I do know something she is thinking. I know because nearly everyone who has been in my office the past twenty-seven years who is guilty of adultery has told me. This woman is thinking "If only." Those two words are being spoken to herself over and over again. "I messed-up. I'm broken. If only."

Notice what Jesus does, says Claypool. Jesus changes the refrain from "If only" to "Next time."

John Claypool asks that we notice what Jesus does in this story from John's Gospel. Jesus knows that this woman is saying to herself, in her heart and mind, "If only." "If only I had made different choices. If only I had not made this mistake. If only." Notice what Jesus does, says Claypool. Jesus changes the refrain from "If only" to "Next time." Jesus tells us to deal with our mistakes, our brokenness and sin with the refrain, "Next time." Jesus does not point His finger at the woman. And He is clear to her accusers that they need to learn to blush for their own sins before pointing their finger. Then Jesus simply tells her not to sin again. "Next time," says Jesus. Our faith is all about "Next time." That is to be the churches' response as well. We all stand before God as broken people. Our words to one another are to be words of forgiveness and "Next time."

Thomas Long shares a wonderful true story of a professor at Yale University. This professor is the father to a five-year-old son. One October, the teacher of the boy's kindergarten class suggested that the children make some kind of present for their parents. The present would be worked on during the fall semester and given as a Christmas gift. The son of this Yale professor decided to make a ceramic ashtray. The teacher helped this young student mold the clay, paint the ashtray exactly the way he wanted it painted and place it in the kiln to fire it. The small boy was most pleased with the result, the gift he had made with his own hands.

On the last day of school before the Christmas break, the little boy wrapped his gift ashtray in bright wrapping paper and yards of scotch tape. When the school bell rang, he reached for his winter coat and his gift at the same time. Struggling to put on his coat, grasp his gift, wave goodbye to his friends and run out of the classroom to his waiting parents, he dropped his Christmas present. The sound of breaking ceramic was unmistakable. When he realized what just happened, that the gift he so proudly fashioned now broken and hopes for surprising his parents now in shambles, he began to sob uncontrollably. The father was the first to get to his son. Partly to address the boy's pain and partly to manage the father's own sense of

discomfort, the father embraced his son and said, "It's alright, son. It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter."

The mother was much wiser in these matters. She pushes her husband aside, embraces her son and corrects the father. "No, you are wrong – you are very wrong. It matters a great deal." She then proceeds to cry with her son. After several minutes of tears, the mother removes from her purse a tissue, carefully dries the tears from her son's eyes and then with incredible wisdom speaks tenderly to her son: "Come on, let's pick up the pieces and see what we can make of what is left."

If you are guilty of adultery or have experienced betrayal of your marriage vows, Jesus calls you to change your refrain from "If only," and hear His words, "Next time."

If you are guilty of adultery or have experienced betrayal of your marriage vows, Jesus calls you to change your refrain from "If only," and hear His words, "Next time." Then, if you listen carefully, you will hear the tender words of a Father who says to every one of us, "Let's pick-up the pieces of your life and see what we can make of what's left. Amen."