

“YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING?”

Matthew 5:20-37

Crossings Conference, Homily 3
January 24, 2012; Morning Prayer

Perhaps some of you remember one of the best selling books of the 1980's, Robert Fulghum's *All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten*.

ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten.

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Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat.

Flush.

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Think what a better world it would be if all – the whole world – had cookies and milk about three o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankies for a nap. Or if all governments had a basic policy to always put things back where

they found them and to clean up their own mess.

And it is still true, no matter how old you are— when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.

© Robert Fulghum, 1990.

Found in Robert Fulghum, All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten, Villard Books: New York, 1990, page 6-7.

Fulghum makes it seem so simple. If we would just stop making things so complicated, focus on the essentials, try to do our best, life would turn out to be pretty good.

Then Jesus comes along and blows it all out of the water. In fact, after listening to Jesus, it seems impossible. Even the simplest of commandments like not killing and not committing adultery, that we thought we could keep, at least some of the time, Jesus makes impossible to keep. According to Jesus, we are all murderers, adulterers and liars.

“Jesus, you have got to be kidding!”

Like an Xray exposing the tumor within, like a surgeon using a scalpel to cut out diseased tissue, like the drunk caught driving, sitting in jail and no longer able to avoid facing the truth of his addiction, Jesus won't let us off the hook. He applies *tough* love not because he hates us but because he loves us. He loves us so much that he won't let us go on denying the truth, destroying ourselves and wrecking the world.

Robert Fulghum makes it all seem so doable like the Pharisees did in Jesus' day. But that's not good enough. “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven.” (5:20)

We all want to know how to live, what to do and how to be, because we want to be right. We long to be good. We want know that we matter. Maybe we are not so much thinking about how to be right with God, but we sure want to be right with everyone else. When it comes to the job we are doing, to the class we are taking or to the marriage we living, we all want to be right. Righteousness may not be the hottest topic on Twitter, but it is the hottest topic around the coffee pot, in the lunchroom and on the family vacation. Our anger reveals it. Our gossip confirms it. Our plotting exposes it. However, the more we try to be right, the more it slips away. The more tightly we grip, the more quickly it disappears, . . . like sand running through the cracks between our fingers. The more we try to be right with the crowd, the more we expose that we don't care about being right with God.

But Jesus does even more than just expose the cancer, drive us to our knees and rub our face in the dirt. Jesus joins us there IN the dirt, UNDER the scalpel, ON our knees, IN the midst of the hatred, lies and deceits . . . ON the cross. The same accusations and incriminations which make us want to run and hide, Jesus embraces. Hanging with sinners and tax collectors, willing to be numbered with the unclean and unwanted, he is arrested in the Garden, attacked by his enemies and nailed to a tree

because he cavorted with sinners . . . LIKE US. The beauty of it all is that Jesus wanted it that way. He is no unwilling victim. He wanted this. Jesus is guilty as charged for daring to do what no one else dared to do: love sinners, murders, adulterers and liars like us . . . and declares us right, righteous, OK, born again, a new creation . . . defying God in the name of God!

Jesus, **you gotta be kidding!** It is one thing to expose our cover, but then to turn around and tell us to stand tall, take heart and rejoice because all is now well, **you gotta be kidding!**

Who do you think you are to over rule God? . . . God or something?

Dying on the cross he seemed like a liar and fool. But when God raises Him from the dead, God says "Yes! That's my boy! He did exactly what I wanted Him to." There God confirms everything Jesus said and did, not only His forgiveness of murders, adulterers, liars, cheats and any other shameful name you can call us, but also Jesus' decision to overturn God's own accusations in order to make the wrong . . . right, the unsuitable . . . just, the crooked . . . straight . . . and sinners . . . saints.

You gotta be kidding!

God says, **"No, I am not kidding."**

As sure as we hear the waters splash in the baptismal font, as we taste wine on our lips and bread in our mouths, as we feel a hand grasp ours and a voice say, "The Peace of the Lord be with you," we can be certain. Our righteousness even exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees. We have been welcomed into the Kingdom of Heaven.

No kidding!

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