

The Great Commandment Goes Out to the Golf Course

October 26, 2008

(Pentecost 24 - Year A)

Matthew 22: 34-46

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Beginning in early September, my son, John, and I began to take golf lessons.

Since neither one of us had ever played golf before, John and I took "Beginning Golf," through the continuing education courses offered by MCC.

In our golf class, we learned all the basic rules about golf, especially in regard to the all-important golf swing.

We learned how to address the ball, how to bring the golf club back with an easy tempo and how to lead into the down swing with your hip. We learned how to use different shots, such as putting and chipping and pitching.

Outside of class, I even bought the book entitled, "Golf for Dummies," and read on it in the evenings.

And then, John and I went out on a few Sunday afternoons to the driving range to practice our swing.

Yet, after the lessons and after practice on the driving range, we finally felt that it was time for us to take what we had learned out onto an actual golf course.

So, last Thursday, on my day off, I checked John out of school an hour early for a 2:45 tee time at Cottonwood Creek.

We got our cart, loaded up our brand new bags of clubs, and headed out onto a real golf course.

We had a great time out there on a beautiful, cool fall afternoon.

And when we finished, John and I felt really good about our very first game.

Now, I know that golfers are not supposed to brag out their scores.

But, I am proud to say that John shot a 71 and I shot a 69...

On the first 9 holes.

Now, we learned several things in our very first time on the golf course.

First of all, we learned that we spent a lot of our time looking for balls that we hit skittering through the grass or veered off the fairway or landed dead in the water.

We learned that there was no way we could hide the fact that we looked like we were beginners.

But, most importantly, we learned that, even though you can learn about all the commandments of golf in books and in class and out on the driving range,

You aren't really playing golf until you take a risk to look foolish - Ad take those commandments out onto a real, live, actual golf course.

In the last week of Jesus' life on this earth, a lawyer approaches Jesus with a question.

The lawyer asks Jesus:

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

Jesus answers:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...

And a second [great commandment] is like it:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

In this Summary of the Law, Jesus teaches us that the greatest commandment is the law of love:

We are to love God.

And we are to love our neighbor.

We talk about love of God and love of our neighbor all the time in church.

We are given lots of opportunities to practice these great commandments in our community life here at St. Alban's.

We sing and we praise and we profess our love of God during our worship services.

We read from the book “Loving for Dummies” - also known as the Bible.

And, we are given opportunities to love our neighbor, by serving with each other in the choir or on an ushering team or in a Bible study

fellowship group.

Here at St. Alban's, we *do* learn the basic commandments about loving.

Yet, when we practice those great commandments of love within these safe walls,

We are just taking lessons, we are just practicing our swing over and over again at the driving range,

Until we go out and love God and love our neighbor on that real, live, actual course that we call - the world.

Last Friday, I attended a breakfast meeting at Doris Miller Elementary School.

This breakfast meeting was for all the Partners in Education who have agreed to help out at that school this year.

St. Alban's has adopted Doris Miller Elementary School and we are now a Partner in Education with them.

We have also adopted Provident Heights Elementary School, as well.

In his Letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul writes that Jesus brings peace to those who are far off and to those who are near.¹

Therefore, I think it is very cool that we have adopted a Doris Miller, which is a school far off on the other side of the Brazos River, and we have adopted Provident Heights, which is a school very near to us.

At any rate, on Friday morning, I could have worked in the church office and practiced my swing, by editing the worship leaflet or by planning my Sunday school lesson.

Instead, I drove out into the real world and to Doris Miller Elementary School for this breakfast meeting.

At this meeting, I was able to meet new and different people.

I was able to see, firsthand, the extraordinary needs of this little school.

I was able to see how we, at St. Alban's, can love God and love other people, through this school.

And, I was able to see how we can meet and love people that we would have never had the chance to meet before.

¹ See Ephesians 2:17

We are able to meet these new and different people because we are St. Alban's Episcopal Church, which is a community that is not afraid to risk and to get out in the world to live out Jesus' great commandments of love.

In living out this commandment to love, St. Alban's is going to provide dinner at the PTA meeting at Doris Miller Elementary School on January 22nd.

This PTA meeting is going to be their Family Reading Night. And the main way to get families to attend this educational event will be to provide them with a meal.

And, at Provident Heights Elementary School, St. Alban's is going to provide dinner at their PTA meeting on November 18th.

This dinner will be a way for us to introduce ourselves to this school and to meet our immediate neighbors, who are just blocks away from St. Alban's.

Our partnerships with both of these schools will allow us to take risks, to get out onto the course and really use Jesus' commandments to love, that we learn in this building.

You see, learning the basic commandments of loving God and loving others *is* important.

But then, St. Alban's is here to help you, to push you out, out into the real world, where we can put Jesus' great commandments of love into action.

Today, we hear Jesus teach us the greatest commandment:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...

And a second is like it:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

So, learn these great commandments and practice them here.

Then, take a risk - and love God and other people outside these walls - and outside your comfort zone.

You might hit the ball into a sand trap, you might swing at the air and

miss, you might even look like a foolish beginner.
But just remember:
Even Jesus gave love his best shot,
And landed dead in the water.

AMEN.

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