

1. I still remember it very clearly, even though I was very young.
2. A conversation my parents had about me.
  - a. It was because I was different from other boys and girls in my kindergarten class.
  - b. They had already noticed it;
  - c. But my kindergarten teacher brought it to their attention,
  - d. And she felt they should correct it.
    - i. Before I got any older,
    - ii. And had to suffer the shame and the handicap of that difference.
3. What was that horrible shaming difference?
  - a. I was left - handed.
4. Yes many young people might laugh,
  - a. But those of us who are older will remember
  - b. When left - handedness was looked on with suspicion and in some cases fear.
5. Left-handedness was different, maladaptive, contrary to nature,
  - a. as evidenced by the simple fact that most of us were right handed.
6. This rejection of left-handedness was shared by many western cultures;
  - a. It was *gauche* for the French,
  - b. *sinister* for the Italians.
  - c. Many Catholic schools forced students to write right handed
  - d. And even my public school teacher was concerned enough
    - i. To bring it up to my parents.
  - e. For who would want their child to be . . . different?
7. The idea that people could be so afraid about left-handedness is laughable nowadays.
  - a. But the fear is not.
8. Because fear of someone who is different is alive and well.
  - a. We feel it whenever we walk down the street or sit on the bus.
  - b. We experience it every time we see someone
    - i. who looks different
    - ii. Dresses different
    - iii. Comes from a different country,
    - iv. speaks a different language,
    - v. lives a different lifestyle.
9. The fear is so visceral we often do not question it; we simply react to it;
  - a. We join clubs and cliques of people who think like us
  - b. We form parties and organizations of people who vote like us
  - c. We establish congregations and whole churches
    - i. filled with people who believe and pray like us.
    - ii. Dividing the world into us and them.
10. This tendency is so basic to us as humans,
  - a. that it is little wonder that often it is presumed not only to be our preference,
    - i. but God's will.
11. For the people of Israel, God's will was that they had to be different
  - a. They had to eat differently, live differently dress differently from others.
  - b. We still see this tendency amongst the Jewish people today

- c. And it is no secret what the people of Israel have had to suffer as a result of their difference.
12. Many of us wonder why the Jewish people choose to be so different.
13. But if we could ask any of the Pharisees in Jesus' day,
- a. They would have told us that in order to be God's people they had to be different;
    - i. They had to distinguish themselves from the impurity and sinfulness of the world;
    - ii. They had to dress differently, eat differently, live differently and pray differently from the pagan gentiles around them;
    - iii. Otherwise they were afraid they would stop being who they knew they were supposed to be; whom God called them to be.
14. According to the Pharisees
- a. Following God's law, summed up in the commandments, was the sure guide of remaining one of God's people.
15. And according to the Pharisees,
- a. That is why Jesus was to be so feared.
  - b. Because this young preacher from the hill country of Galilee had already shown a remarkable laxity about the law
  - c. Speaking with people "our" people would not speak with
  - d. Eating with people "our" people would not eat with
16. Jesus was different. And thus the religious authorities saw it as their duty to discredit him in the eyes of his growing number of followers
- a. Because otherwise they were afraid their people would stop being the people God called them to be.
17. They had already tried to make a fool out of him over the question of paying taxes to Caesar; Now they bring out their big gun; an expert in the law
18. He asked Jesus which of the many commandments and laws was the greatest; the one which if you followed it you would follow all the others,
- a. and thus be a faithful member of God's people?
    - i. They might have expected he would mention one of the ten;
    - ii. They might have expected he would refer to one of their rules;
19. But instead he reached right to the heart of their faith,
- a. citing the prayer every faithful Jew uttered every day; the command to love God;
  - b. and then right after it, the command to love your neighbor as yourself
    - i. which Jesus said was essentially the same thing.
20. We do not hear the reaction of the Pharisees to Jesus' answer in today's reading; but if we were to read on we would;
- a. "From that day on nobody dared to put any more questions to him."
21. What about Jesus' answers were so frightening to the Pharisees?
- a. Perhaps part of the answer was that word LOVE.
  - b. LOVE GOD - LOVE NEIGHBOR.
22. For us there are few words as innocuous as love.
- a. For us it is something we can just as easily feel for a new dress as a new spouse
  - b. We love meals, houses, our country our God.

23. But the Pharisees knew that for them,
  - a. Love was not first and foremost a feeling; it was an action.
  - b. And what Jesus was saying and they were forced to admit was,
  - c. that to love the God who chose them was to love those around them.
24. And that was the problem. Because they also knew what Moses had said in this morning's first reading. They knew that
  - a. those around them included not just Jews but foreigners.
  - b. Not just people in "normal families", but widows and orphans.
  - c. Not just people of means but the poor and those in debt.
25. According to the Law which Moses revealed, the Pharisees followed, and Jesus proclaimed to love God and neighbor meant
  - a. To care for the foreigner
  - b. To support the widow and the orphan
  - c. To be generous to the poor and relieve the burdens of those burdened by debt.
26. No wonder they shut up.
  - a. Because they realized that they could not Love God; they could not love neighbor, they could not follow the law unless they treated "them" whoever they were - as if they were "us".
  - b. Because according to God, they already are.
27. I am relieved that my parents chose against the suggestion of my teacher.
  - a. I am still left-handed and proud of it.
  - b. And yes I have had to deal with right - handed scissors, ladles, measuring cups and of course Golf clubs; but they are hardly the shaming divisive obstacles that my teacher feared they would be for me in a right handed world.
28. But then of course being right handed is no longer considered different; just a difference.
  - a. Imagine what the world would look like if that were case for others;
    - i. Imagine what would happen if people like those widows and orphans if people like the aliens, people like the poor and the indebted;
    - ii. People who live outside the respectable norms of our society,
      1. Were treated and cared for the way we treat our own;
    - iii. Or to put it in Jesus' words, what would happen if we loved our neighbors as ourselves?
29. Well then there would be no more them and us; only us.
  - a. And we would think and act,
  - b. Work, and vote to see to it that all people were cared for and treated with dignity
    - i. As members of our community
    - ii. And part of God's people.
30. I don't know about you, but that sounds like the kingdom of God to me.