

(For Monday, June 5, 2017) **So what's in your Spiritual suitcase?**

"You shall therefore love the Lord your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always." (Deut.11:1, ESV)

The Hebrew word for "love" used here is *ahab*. This instruction to "love your God" was part of the "Greatest Commandment" established by God through Moses (See Deut.5:6) and reaffirmed by Jesus (See Mt.22:37). In the Old Testament, this commandment to "love your God" was often given to the Israelites as they were getting ready to embark on some journey or battle. It's as though this love of God was one of the critical things that God was defining for his people in order to best protect them from the adversities they were getting ready to face. It's natural to try and protect yourself and those you love from worldly threat through careful planning, frugal saving, and wisely thought-out life choices.

But what about God? Is your love for him part of what you've packed for your journey?

(For Tuesday, June 6, 2017) **What's in your carry-on baggage?**

"Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear: forget your people and your father's house, and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, blow to him." (Pa.45:10-11, ESV)

The Bible often uses contexts we can understand in order to describe the relationship between God and his children. So Jesus described the Kingdom of God using various agrarian-focused parables. Paul describes the Christian witness in terms of an athletic competition. Maybe looking at God in the context of an airline journey might be appropriate for us. In Psalm 45, the bride, who represents God's people, is required to forget her prior family loyalty in order to be fully integrated into her new family. If anything from this earthly life – family loyalty, job aspirations, a sense of self-privilege – is brought with us into our relationship with The Lord, we can never reach the true and full intimacy and wonder that should be part of our journey with Jesus.

Are there some things you need to remove from your carry-on bag to lighten your load during your journey so that you can really focus on a conversation with Jesus? Because he's in the seat firth next to you!

(For Wednesday, June 7, 2017) **Would you rather be liked than loved?**

"As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting." (2Cor.7:9a)

Sometimes, when people are trying to be tolerant of views with which they don't agree, they are accused of being "politically correct." It is laudable to practice common courtesy and sincere tolerance. But when we shy away from humbly and lovingly calling someone to remedy a destructive behavior pattern simply to avoid conflict, we are really betraying the Baptismal Covenant which, in my own denomination includes a promise "to seek and serve Christ in all persons." Not causing a brother or sister to stumble (See 1Cor.8:13) includes speaking the truth in the face of resentment, even if that can mean a "bump in the road" for relationships we hold dear. But to knowingly ignore behavior which you believe will be harmful or destructive to the people you know is really a betrayal of our Christian witness.

Are you placing too much emphasis on someone's affections for you, and not enough on their eternal salvation? Are you focused on being liked by someone or loved by The Father?

(For Thursday, June 8, 2017) **What's the real purpose of prayer?**

"I tell you he [God] will give justice to them [those who persist in faithful prayer] speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Lk.18:9, ESV)

In ministry, one of the things which has become clear to me is that earthly goals rarely have much to do with God's objectives. In our church, we have recently remodeled our kitchen, which had been out of commission because of storm-damage. And I'm over-joyed that we now have the ability to break bread together on a regular basis. Yay! Yet I can't help but think that God had other things in mind when he placed this remodeling project before us. And maybe his objectives included bringing the members of our church closer together through working side-by-side in renewing the plumbing and the painting in a part of our building. For The Lord, the strengthening of these loving relationships, and enlarging the faith of the people involved was probably more important than the new fridge. I think a lot of prayer is like that; much of prayer is about strengthening our faith in God and our relationships with each other.

Is God letting obstacles occur in order to oblige you to talk with him through regular, earnest prayer, just so you can get to know him better?

(For Friday, June 9, 2017) **Which realm do you dwell in?**

"But he [Jesus] said, 'What is impossible with men is possible is with God.'" (Lk.18:27, ESV)

Over and over, Scripture assures us that there is no limitation on what God can and will do for his faithful children. But, that means God's children have to be willing to place themselves in situations where God can act. No, we should certainly not test God (See Lk.4:12), which would involve wantonly placing ourselves in situations of compromise simply to find out if God will come to our rescue. But sometimes, God needs his children to step out in faith and attempt what would seem unreasonable or even impossible by earthly standards in order that God can demonstrate his love and sovereignty.

So, do you dwell in the realm of earthly possibility, or in the realm of heavenly wonder?