

Gospel Reading: Matthew 15: 10 - 20
Sermon Text: Colossians 3: 14 - 17

And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

When I was a kid my dad and I would take annual camping trips; every summer. One year we brought mom and Rachel, my sister, along to Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons. And many years we brought along my sister and my beloved grandma with us too. Most often though, it was just dad and me. We visited Yosemite, Kings Canyon, Sequoia National Forest, Crater Lake, Buck's Lake, the Oregon Caves, a handful of others and, of course, dad drove. Which meant that I had to navigate. Which further meant that I had to learn to read a map! (Props)

Old maps meant that if there was roadwork or an accident or some kind of natural event that closed off a road or a highway, we wouldn't know about it until we stumbled upon it. Then, we'd get our trusty map back out and reroute. Now with GPS you'll know before you even start driving if there's anything blocking your potential path and it will reroute for you.

Another way to say reroute is course correction. Sometimes the course that we are driving on needs to be adjusted or changed. This becomes an apt analogy for our lives as well. Sometimes the course that we are living encounters various roadblocks or hazards, or is simply the wrong direction, and we need a course correction. This is the idea behind Paul's use of the word admonishment. In admonishing one another we are to assist one another with course corrections should the need arise. The Greek verb that Paul is using is *νουθετέω*. Specifically this means to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct. (Repeat) To assist one another in recognizing the need for a course correction. Paul is giving us permission to hold another accountable; a sometimes uncomfortable, but often a very necessary thing. Paul is giving us permission to pay attention to ourselves first, to ensure that our words and our actions match up, integrity; and then to *also* pay attention to our friends, family members, and church family members to encourage them to have their words and actions match up, integrity. Please do note the way that I subtly changed how we handle our own integrity and our friends and families. We ensure our *own* integrity. We encourage, through admonishment, our friends and families integrity. We can only control our own actions. We cannot control the actions of others even when it comes to our children and even when it comes, for grown children, to our parents.

Improper courses of conduct are many and varied. They have become highly controversial and others are seemingly innocuous. Passive aggressive behavior is not an effective way to handle conflict. It leaves your partner feeling ... (ask Sarah) and it leaves you feeling unheard and unnoticed. Because instead of addressing your own need or want it's just left hanging out there and nothing is actually resolved. It took Sarah several *years* of admonishment until I was finally able to course correct and change that improper course of conduct. The Bible encourages us to engage in and resolve conflict not to avoid it. Jesus certainly did not handle his conflict with the Pharisees and Sadducees in a passive aggressive manner. Thus if I am going to *say* I am a struggling disciple of Jesus, then it is appropriate that my actions match up with that statement and, in my specific case, I stop handling conflict in a passive aggressive manner.

Consider any kind of addiction. The Church has seen many a functioning alcoholic, for example, many an adulterer, throughout the generations. But Paul clearly warns us to do all things in moderation, nothing is prohibited, but not all things are beneficial. Same with folks who use nicotine products in its various forms. The Ten Commandments are even more restrictive, thou shalt not commit adultery. If folks who do these things *say* they are Bible believing, church going folk, then it is appropriate for us to admonish them as we seek to encourage them to course correct and change their improper conduct that is causing them to harm themselves and possibly others. And admonishment can even get as highly controversial as racism or how we treat immigrants or people who speak a different language than us. The Bible is clear, from beginning to end, from the prophets to Jesus to the apostles, in communicating that God shows no partiality; God does not play favorites. Certainly God *calls* people to specific forms of service and work, but that does not give me any kind of special standing in God's coming kingdom. If then we *say* we are Bible believing, church going folk, then it is appropriate for us to admonish one another as encourage one another to course correct and change our improper conduct that is causing our racism, our anti-immigrant attitude, and our lack of acceptance or patience with those who speak a different language from us. Yes. Like I said, the conduct in need of correcting ranges from the seemingly innocuous to the highly controversial but that does not mean that we do not practice admonishment.

Admonishment, despite its discomfort, helps enable living in rhythm with God and with one another. Remember, living in rhythm does not require the same instruments, not even the same exact notes. But it does require everyone being on the same course; everyone flowing in the same, general direction. Admonishment will facilitate and coordinate that rhythmic flow as we proceed towards the kingdom of Heaven here on earth. And that is the hope of the good news and a reason to celebrate and choose joy. Amen.