

Where Do We Draw the Line?

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Psalm 1.1-3; Matthew 22.34-39, 46

I overslept today. I rolled out of bed and jumped in the car and barely made it to church in time. It wasn't until just now that I realized I'm still wearing my negligee!

My great-aunt Gladys had a terrible negligee tragedy once. She and Uncle Arthur decided to take a second honeymoon on a romantic island. Aunt Gladys packed a sheer negligee to help spice things up, but the warm sea breezes must have made her very adventurous. So on the first night of there vacation, she decided to not even unpack her negligee. Instead, she came out of the bathroom in her birthday suite. Thinking this was a terribly romantic gesture, she said, "Well Arthur, how do you like my extra-sheer negligee?" He said, "For God's sake Gladys, run an iron over it." Well she did grab an iron, and shortly thereafter she had to unpack the negligee after all; she had to use it as a tourniquet on Uncle Arthur.

Where do we draw the line? Perhaps at lingerie jokes.

But seriously, where do we draw the line.

That's the question I have been asked 100 times in my ministry. Where do we draw the line?

Of course, "where do we draw the line?" is really a way of asking, "Who do we get to exclude? Who do we get to leave out? Who can we marginalized?" And Jesus answers that question quite effectively today.

Over the years I've had people come to me with broken hearts because they were told by people they trusted that they were beyond the reach of God's love because they were divorced, or because they couldn't accept a certain opinion that had been presented as church doctrine.

Some people were worried that they weren't calling God by the right name, or that they weren't using the right magic formula to make their prayers work.

Most often, people have come to me because they were gay, or lesbian, or transgendered and they had been told that simply admitting the truth about who they were would exclude them from a relationship with God.

In every case, the people who have come to me in tears with these questions have been saying, "Where do we draw the line? I was told the line is drawn where I happen to stand."

Between 1993 and 1996 I officiated about 100 funerals, all before I turned 30. I was an AIDS Chaplain, and ministering to people living with AIDS and trying to comfort people who had lost loved ones to AIDS filled my days and nights. During that difficult period, I got a call one day from a mother. Her son was expected to die in a matter of hours. She called not to prepare the funeral, or to have me bring her son Communion, or even to help her process her feelings.

She called because her son was convinced that he was facing an eternity of torment simply for being who he was. He was too weak to live but too scared to die; scared of the wrath of a petty, vengeful, intolerant god. This mother was hoping against hope that I could ease her son's mind so that his death could be peaceful.

I arrived at the nursing home where her son was being cared for, and she met me in tears. She said, "I guess this is my fault. I always took him to church and that's where he learned that God condemned boys like him," and then she gulped and said, "You know, gay boys." And then she said, "I can't believe that God doesn't love my son. And if God can't love my son, then I have no use for God."

I told her, "that kind of fierce, unrelenting, unconditional, maternal love is how God loves; in fact, that's what God is. If God is Love, then your love for your son is an expression of God, and so you can be sure that God is sharing your tears, and God is right where your son is, holding him gently and God continue to hold him for all eternity."

That mother's love was the true creed. Her righteous anger was nothing less than a sacrament. Her affirmation of her son's innate dignity and sacred value was the most powerful kind of prayer.

I went in to see the young man, who at the time was about my age. I quoted some comforting scriptures, like Hosea 6.6 that tells us that God requires love, not sacrifice. And Micah 6.8 that reminds us that the only thing required of us is to be just, and merciful, and humble before the mystery of life. I reminded him of the prophecy that says God's spirit will be poured out on ALL human-beings (Joel 3.1).

I quoted the writer of the book of 1st John who said that God is love and WHOEVER lives in love lives in God, and God lives in them (4.16). I quoted St. Paul who said whoever loves another has fulfilled the intent of scripture (Romans 13.8).

I reminded him of the Golden Rule, to treat others as you would like to be treated, and how Jesus said that adequately summed up the whole of scripture (Matthew 7.12).

I even quoted today's gospel reading, where Jesus says the most important of all commandments are Leviticus 19.18 - love yourself and then love others as you love yourself; and Deuteronomy 6.5 - love God with all that you are (which we do whenever we love honestly as the people we are).

Finally, I told him how much his mother loved him. He trusted that and he loved her too. And then I quoted him a verse from the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 66.13, speaking for God, says, "Like a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you..."

I assured him that the Mother of all Life, the Source of Life, the Infinite I AM which expresses through and as each one of us, will never, could never reject any of us for any reason. I reminded him of how wonderful his mother was, and then I said, "For any God to be my God, that God would have to be as good as your mother." We prayed together. And that night, he died, peacefully. For the first time in his all too brief life, he was finally willing to believe that just as he was, he too was made in God's image. He finally could believe that God didn't hate him for who he happened to be.

Where do we draw the line? At Catholics? At Protestants? At Jews? At Atheists?
Where do we draw the line? At Muslims? Buddhists? Hindus? Wiccans?
Where do we draw the line? At the wealthy? The poor? The immigrant?
Where do we draw the line? At the gay man? The lesbian? The bisexual? The transgender person?

Where do we draw the line? Who gets left out of God's mercy? Who gets left out of the divine plan? Who do we get to marginalize?

The Psalmist tells us that happiness comes from rejecting violence. I've seen first hand that drawing the line to exclude, condemn, or control people is emotionally violent and leaves no one very happy.

Dr. Wayne Dyer reminds us that we are forever connected to the One divine Source. If we are all united in the One Divine Life...who can draw the line? What line is there to draw? Who could ever be left out?

Jesus tells us in our gospel reading today, "Live in love...this is what the scriptures teach; love is what the scriptures really mean."

Any argument made from scripture to justify slavery, segregation, homophobia, sexism, war, or the bashing of religions that are different from our own is a brutal misrepresentation of the scriptures. Jesus said it's all about love. And where does love draw the line? I don't believe Love is in the line drawing business. Lines are meant to exclude, and that's something that God's Love will never do.

This is the good news. Amen.

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*God's Love leaves no one out!
Divine Love enfolds me, just as I am.
Divine Love flows through me, just as I am.
Divine Love comforts me, here and now.
Divine Love strengthens me, here and now.
I am a perfect drop in the Ocean of Life .
I am one with my Source, and I am blessed.
As one who is blessed, I now bless others.
Alleluia!*

"Even if you should be in the midst of misfortune, do not lose your confidence. Leap right into the realization that you are a child of God...We are all children of God. Praise yourself the same way you would praise others...[and thus] bring out the God who dwells within you." – Dr. Masaharu Taniguchi (founder of the Seicho-No-Ie Church in Japan)