

Welcome back (kind of) to this fourth Sunday of Lent, our time to stop and take a look at where you are on your journey of faith. For now we have more or less been forced to stop. We need to use this time to take a look around, find your bearings and notice the signs that God has put in your life. As you can see, we have considered a few different signs thus far and today we look upon “Yield.” For many the Yield sign is nothing but an optional stop sign. We see it only at quiet intersections and when you are trying to turn onto a divided highway or a roundabout. In fact, driver’s manuals will tell you to stop at a yield sign only when it is necessary. It’s more or less a word of caution. Pay attention, put your head on a swivel and take a look around. It may be the case that you need to stop here...but if not, then on your way. That’s its function on our society, but I think this sign also holds an important function in our spiritual lives. I want to look at two different aspects of that function today.

The first is a relinquishing of rights. That’s what yield means...It is anti-action.... I will stop so you can go. I will stop because I understand you have the right of way. I will stop because I am in the lesser place...I do not have preference; I am not the most important one...I yield.

This, dear church needs to be our posture before our holy God. Yes, Lord, Have Your way. This is not Burger King, we are not seeking our own will to be done...we yield before our God. We allow him to proceed and we follow. It sounds good and right and obvious. God is God and I am not, so, naturally I will let God go ahead of me. It's so simple...but what is it with us humans that we have to be so insistent on our own way. We plow forward not knowing what's ahead but somehow confident that we will be just fine. We are rats in a race, always busy, always in a hurry. Psalm 46:10 tells us to "Be still and know that I am God." Yield before your Maker....allow him to proceed.

But as I said, we are stiff-necked, boneheaded....children. And I know a thing or two about stiff-necked, boneheaded children. My son Ezra and I have a fun little activity we engage in every now and then. He'll say, in his eight year old misguided confidence, 'Dad, try to crush me.' Then he will stand in front of me facing away and brace himself. I will then proceed to lay my hands on his shoulders and slowly increase putting weight downward on his tiny frame. He'll grunt and groan and wheeze a little until finally his knees buckle and he lies crumpled on the floor. Then he pops up and says, 'Do it again!' So we will do it a couple of more times and each time he tries to last a little longer but, at some point, he must yield. He must give way to the pressure put upon him. But he keeps

trying...and I am well aware that eventually a time will come when I will attempt to crush my son and I will fail. He will outgrow our little game. His stature will be beyond my ability to crush and in fact I might have to yield to him! What a dark day that will be... And in our sin, we can approach God as an eight-year-old Ezra, we approach God with a stubborn will to outlast him thinking that eventually it could happen.

But we know it won't. We cannot ultimately stand up to God...not if we want to be in relationship with him. See God will allow us to turn and walk away. We can reject him, we have that freedom. But when we come to Him, we must come on His terms. We must understand who is who in the relationship. He is God, we are not.

Now, I have great faith and hope that my children will grow to be godly men and women, despite my failures and shortcomings as their father. I hope my children will also grow to realize the value of the disciplines and punishments they have received over the years. I just know that they will understand that a loving parent enacts discipline for the children they love. If you have kids, you've been there. You know the struggle of trying to punish appropriately and making sure love is the foundation of our actions. And sometimes we need to be crushed...if we will

not yield to God in our lives, if we try to stand up under the weight of his glory, we will be crushed. Because God is God and he cannot be something else. But God's crushing happens in a very specific way. Songwriter Terry Taylor puts it beautifully in a song called Crushing Hand by the Lost Dogs. I'd like to take a minute to listen to this song and notice how it describes this process of yielding... "Lay Your crushing hand, your mighty hand on me gently."

The book of Hebrews puts it this way:

Read Hebrews 12:7-11

Notice this use of the word, "later"!

Remember Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory? My daughter was just in the musical at her school. We are all familiar with the colorful characters, foremost of which is one Veruca Salt. Veruca is a terror. She demands and demeans and shouts when she doesn't get her way. The Oompa Loompas rightly know who to blame for such horrible behavior...the mother and the father.

No one will say that disciple is fun, but if God is our heavenly Father, than we are his children and we ought to be open to his correction...why?...So we can share in his holiness, so we can yield...Our word of the day...the peaceful fruit of

righteousness. See yield in Scripture doesn't mean pause and take turns. Yield has to do with a product or a result. It's used in agriculture where a plant yields it's fruit or a crop yields a harvest. Jesus uses the word repeatedly in his parable of the sower where a seed that falls on good soil yields 30 or 60 or 100 times what was sown. If the disciples were to see a yield sign, they would think of farm fields or quantities of fish. And in terms of Jesus' teaching, they might think of what? The harvest of new converts to the faith! They might think about the state of the churches they are a part of...what do these ministries yield? They might think about the amount of spiritual fruit they see in their own lives. They would see this sign as a call to action. It would be a divine injunction. Yield good fruit in your lives! Produce a harvest of righteousness, a harvest of holiness, a harvest of peace.

Are these words that describe your life? Righteousness? Holiness? Peaceful?

See, we are all guilty of failing to yield...

Failure to yield can easily result in disaster. Hopefully, if you are a driver, you know that pedestrians have the right of way, but failure to yield in that circumstance can be deadly. Failing to yield in the spiritual sense has deadly consequences as well. For if we never accept discipline, we will never grow. In fact, without discipline, we cannot rightly be called a son or daughter of God.

Now, I am sure you have heard people say, “We are all children of God.” And in one sense, yes that is true. God created each and every person in his own image...he loves us all. But in the more important sense, it is not true that we are all God’s children. To be God’s child indicates that we have a relationship with Him. That we know him in such an intimate sense that He is willing to enact his crushing hand upon us sometimes. There are many who outright reject a relationship with God, who will not accept any form of hardship or discipline...can it be said that they are his children? Not according to the book of Hebrews. We are truly God’s children when we experience discipline from His gentle, crushing hand.

If we constantly flee from and avoid discipline, we become loud, irritating, demanding little Verucas. As such, we cannot offer wisdom to anyone else. We cannot point out to them the path of life, because we ourselves don’t know the way. We all know the type of fruit a Veruca Salt produces...rottenness...and if we are rotten Christians, our impact on the world will be rotten, and people whom Jesus died for will not come to know the truth about heaven and hell if we remain undisciplined. Failure to yield has eternal consequences.

Disciples accept discipline.

Disciples make other disciples.

Disciples are out in the field.

Disciples yield to God....and they yield a harvest.

Yield to God...yield a harvest.

Accept his discipline, grow into it, and you will produce the peaceful fruit of righteousness. And you yourself will be able to function as a signpost for others...Here is the way of life...follow me, I'll show you!

We need to be reflective in this time of anxiety and stress. It is still Lent. And as such we need to stop and think:

What comes to mind when you see a yield sign? Is it a call to action?

Where do you need to yield to God and open up to His crushing hand?

Where do you need to be more concerned about results? What fruit does your life yield?

Even in the midst of hardship and “social distancing” I encourage you to take the time to draw near to God and let Him draw near to you. Allow him to fill you with his peace as he grows within you the fruit of righteousness and makes us more like Jesus. Amen.