

If ...Then ...

If I drop a brick on my bare toe then my toe will hurt.
If we pour vinegar all over a pile of baking soda, we'll get a neat chemical reaction and lots of pretty harmless bubbles.
If the temperature drops below 32F then water will freeze.
If I whistle just right and if my dog isn't too distracted he will come running.

When life is absurdly simple, the phrase "If - then" describes a rather neat cause and effect reaction. However, life is rarely pure or simple.

For example, if there is any breeze blowing over the water, depending on the speed of the wind, and the quantity of water, the water may not freeze, or may freeze even faster. Or if the water is moving briskly the water won't freeze till the temperature drops below 32. But if the air is perfectly still, and the air temperature drops below 32, so that the water temperature drops — well you get the picture — the more variable that come into play, the harder it gets to predict exactly what will happen — and that is just when we talk about freezing water.

When we involve two living creatures like my dog, Toby, who has a lovely and annoying independent streak, my whistle which is pretty changeable in its own right, and whether or not something lying on the ground has an irresistible-to-a-dog, aroma. The conclusion is totally up for grabs, Toby may come to my whistle or not.

Ladies, remember how when we got into our teen years, our mothers and teachers used warn us about how to deal with this if-then proposition. "If you really love me, then prove it. Go parking with me," or a dozen other variations on that theme.

Never having been a teenaged boy, I haven't a clue about the warning dads and teachers might have offered to you guys — I hope their warnings went something like, "don't ever pressure a girl by saying something like, 'If you really love me you'll go parking with me on Lover's Lane.'"

We live with all kinds of "if—then" propositions, hypotheses, assumptions and stereotypes. They can be harmful or helpful. They can guide our lives into new ways of becoming loving and faithful disciples.

This sermon title "If...Then..." just kind of leapt off the page at me as I was reading the gospel lesson for today. We hear it three times — listen again.

The Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2 Jesus fasted for forty days and nights. After this, he was very hungry. 3 The devil came to Jesus to tempt him, saying, "If you are the Son of God, tell these rocks to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written in the Scriptures, 'A person lives not on bread alone, but by everything God says.'"[a]

5 Then the devil led Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem and put him on a high place of the Temple. 6 The devil said, "If you are the Son of God, jump down, because it is written in the Scriptures:

'He has put his angels in charge of you.

They will catch you in their hands

so that you will not hit your foot on a rock.'" Psalm 91:11–12

7 Jesus answered him, "It also says in the Scriptures, 'Do not test the Lord your God.'"[b]

8 Then the devil led Jesus to the top of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and all their splendor. 9 The devil said, "If you will bow down and worship me, I will give you all these things."

10 Jesus said to the devil, "Go away from me, Satan! It is written in the Scriptures, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'"[c]

11 So the devil left Jesus, and angels came and took care of him.

If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.

If you are the Son of God, jump down, because scripture says that you will be safe.

If you will bow down and worship me, I will give you all these things.

Notice that two of these propositions are about identity – *If you are the Son of God*. Notice as well that the consequences reveal a magical expectation. *Tell these stones to become bread, jump off this tower because God will keep you safe*. The third is about idolatry. *If you will worship me, I will give you all the goodies (all the kingdoms of the world)*.

Friends, the world of "If-then" can be as much wilderness, as much as temptation as the wilderness portrayed in the gospels. We can wander amok for a very long time unless we offer wise "if-then" propositions.

Propositions as questions of identity might be helpful indeed. If I am a child of God then – then what?

If I am a child of God, (and I believe each and every one of us is a beloved child of God). So if I am a beloved child of God, do something magical– not so much

If I am, if each of us, is a beloved child of God, what do I want to become, what do I want to do?? Hmmmmmm. If I am a beloved child of God, I want to become –

I want to become a blessing in our world. I suspect that I became aware, a very long time ago that I wanted to become a blessing – Ok - so what can I do to become a blessing? What will remind me to become a blessing?

A very long time ago I discovered that if I sign off on my emails, phone calls, letters, with the word, “blessing” it reminds me of how I want to be in the world. And I do need reminding. I still need reminding that I want to be a blessing. Now you now why I sign my emails the way I do. Everytime I sign off, I am reminding myself how I want to be in life.

Since we each of us, are beloved children of God, we each need to be discovering who/how it is God dreams we might be in the world. And be about becoming who and how God dreams we might be in the world.

Do you suspect God dreams that you might be a friend, that God dreams you might be compassion, that you might be patience, that you might be ??? joy, peace, justice, kindness, healing, prayer??

Complete this sentence for yourself: Since I am a beloved child of God then I can become joy, or peace, or justice, or kindness or prayer? What is your natural God-given way of being?

Friend this is the first week of Lent, the purple season. Make this question part of your prayer, “Since I am your beloved child, O God, how would you have me being, becoming?” Or if that is too long, try it this way: “Since I am your beloved child, O God, then what?”

Practice it with me now. Out loud – Since I am your beloved child, O God, then what? XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX One more time XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.

Let’s take these words from Jesus wilderness journey deeply into our hearts and lives – If ...then.... Let’s take these words and claim our very identity – since I am your beloved child, then what.

Amen