

THIDWICK, THE BIG-HEARTED MOOSE

AUGUST 11 AND 12, 2018

MARK 1: 29-39; LUKE 9: 1-6

People can be difficult – that’s an understatement, isn’t it? Just think about your own family and the crowd that gathers at your yearly family reunion. Is there always someone that has to be the center of attention? What about the person who has the story that can top everyone else’s story no matter what it is? It doesn’t matter if what you say is good or bad, they can always top you. Know someone like that? Don’t we all?

Think about where you work. Is there that one coworker who never has anything positive to say about anything? You reach all of your goals but they are still critical of how you do your job? What about your circle of friends? Is there that one friend that reminds you of the classic Saturday Night Live character Debbie Downer ... that friend who can throw cold water on any party and ruin even the best events.

I do have to warn you, if you can’t think of the family member, coworker or friend who is this challenging to deal with – then maybe it’s you!

The point is we all have challenging, difficult and at times even toxic people in our lives. We aren’t talking about people who are evil, violent and psychotic. We’re talking about the kind of people we interact with every day. Sometimes we think we can change them or save them so

we keep reaching out to them, but what often ends up happening is we don’t lift them up – they bring us down. Difficult relationships can take us away from God's best and draw us into lifestyles that can be physically, emotionally and spiritually harmful.

In all relationships, our goal should always be to bring life, to see each person created in God’s image, to do good and no harm.

But for us to be able to do that, we have to stay spiritually healthy. And that means, sometimes we need to set relationship boundaries. Boundaries are not bad. The better our boundaries, the greater our capacity to offer empathy and love to others. Boundaries help us to be able to love better.

Boundaries are a big issue for Thidwick, the Big-Hearted Moose. Thidwick is the kind of moose who embodies the role of the gracious host.

When the Bingle Bug asks for a ride on top of the moose's antlers, Thidwick says:

“Sure, be my guest and I hope that you're comfortable there!”

That Bingle Bug wouldn’t weigh him down, and there's plenty of room -- even after the Bingle Bug invites the Tree-Spider and the Zinn-a-zu bird to join him on the antlers — without Thidwick's permission, I might add.

Then the Zinn-a-zu bird got married and his wife joins in and wife invites her uncle, the woodpecker, who made holes in the antlers that made Herman the squirrel and his family of three a nice home. Then there came:

a bobcat;
a turtle
a Fox;
some Mice;
fleas;
a big bear;
and exactly 362 bees.

With each added antler guest, Thidwick's antlers became heavier and heavier and began to bog him down.

Kindness is important, but so are boundaries. And boundaries are firmly in the rearview mirror as Thidwick struggles with his antler tenants. He's about to learn a valuable and important lesson.

As winter comes, Thidwick needs to migrate to the south side of Lake Winna-Bango for some moose-moss. Without it, he'll starve. His antler tenants decide to put the matter of moving south to a vote. Thidwick votes yes, since his life depends upon it, but he is swiftly outvoted by his antler tenants.

Having been outvoted, the overburdened moose is chased and then cornered by the Harvard Club Hunters. And just at that moment is when Thidwick remembers that today is the day his antlers come off.

And the "host, above all who must be nice to his guests" drops his antlers and its tenants; and heads across the lake for a moose-moss munching lunch. At the end of the book, the antlers and the antler tenants all end up stuffed on the Harvard Club wall.

It's a perfect example of how relationships can become difficult and even, toxic, to both parties, when we don't keep appropriate boundaries. And sometimes, even if we try establishing healthy boundaries, but the other person refuses to honor them, we may reach a place where distancing ourselves is the only option.

Life is precious. Yet all too often, we may find that much of our time is spent around people that are draining the life right out of us. Sometimes they're co-workers, friends, and sadly, even family members.

Setting healthy boundaries in relationships is a Christ-like thing to do. In his earthly ministry, Jesus set boundaries repeatedly. He had a purpose for His life and death that no one could distract Him from; and He gives us a great deal of insight into knowing how to set boundaries that allow us to stay focused on God's will, rather than on our will and the will of those around us.

Jesus said "no" to inappropriate behavior. He didn't always do what people wanted him to do. He set boundaries with His closest friends whenever they tried to steer Him away from God's purpose. And he set boundaries for those he would send out to minister to others. 'If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them'.

Jesus would have times when He would pull away from people to spend time with God, to get strong with God, so He could go back and minister to those who needed Him.

After a long day of teaching and praying for people, today's scripture from Mark says He left the crowds and went away to rest. There were still many needy people asking for prayer. I'm sure some of them thought, "Wow, we traveled all this way, and He didn't even wait to pray for us. He let us down." Jesus wasn't being rude or overlooking their needs; He was taking care of Himself. He knew He needed to get away and get quiet so He could be refreshed to be more effective.

Jesus lived in a rhythm of life that kept him full of God, which enabled him to be compassionate and generous in his response to people, their needs, interruptions, and crisis situations.

God can accomplish great things through us in our relationships with one another if we do our own personal soul care. Understand, though, that it's never up to us to "fix" someone. God never intends for us to spin our wheels, waste our days, trying to please everyone or to make others happy who can never be happy. Because in reality, it doesn't depend on us. It's not up to us. They may want us to think we possess the power to improve the value of their existence, but that's not a burden meant for us to carry.

We can provide a listening ear. We can encourage and empathize. We can speak truth into their lives; we can be honest; we can be assertive about honoring boundaries; we can be willing to say "Stop, no more". But we can't do the

deep soul work for them. They must be willing to take whatever steps are necessary to bring about change.

God can move mountains. God can change hearts. Anything is possible through his power.

Ultimately, we are to love people well. Sit with them in their pain. Be a genuine friend to people who might have a little more mess in their lives than us. But take time to establish healthy boundaries, and be intentional about honoring them. It's not selfish, it's necessary!

And maybe, just maybe our biggest purpose is to be light to them in their darkness, to extend gracious love and forgiveness, but also to show our strength in a mighty God by establishing healthy boundaries. I think that's what Jesus would do.

Let us pray:

Dear God, Sometimes we find it challenging to know when to be supportive to others and when to step back. Sometimes, we give so much of our time, energy or resources to others that we feel drained. Help us to remember that You are the Source and Giver of everything. Help us to follow your example as we work to establish healthy boundaries in all of our relationships. In the name of Jesus, Amen.