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Exodus 32: 1-14
September 15, 2019

What a Whole Lot of Sixes (We Are)

Will you pray with me?

God of the world – God of the courageous, God of the fearful, God of us all who are usually a mixture of both – pour out your spirit on this place and on your people. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our gathered hearts be acceptable to, O God, Our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Well, church this sermon is going to start out sounding a little like insider's baseball. After studying our scripture passage this week – I simply couldn't pass up the opportunity to talk about the Enneagram.

Some of you know what I'm talking about... hopefully we'll all know what I'm talking about by the time I finish.

I couldn't pass up talking about the Enneagram, because I read this passage from Exodus and thought, "Holy Cow, what a whole lot of sixes those Israelites wandering in the desert are!"

By the way, if you have studied the Enneagram, you know the first rule is that you don't type other people. So, I've already broken the cardinal rule.

And since I've done that, why don't we blaze on ahead?

Because I believe this Scripture, this story, is rich.

It's chock FULL of truth about human nature.

And it reveals some truth about God's nature as well. That unchanging, immutable, know-it-all up in the clouds? According to this story, that doesn't describe God so well.

God gets angry. God can have God's heartbroken! By humans, no less. God can seemingly overreact.

Most importantly, God's mind can be changed.

The most important part of this story is what is revealed about God. God is merciful. God's mind can be changed.

But what's revealed about human nature is pretty fascinating as well. And THAT's what takes us back to the Enneagram.

So, three minute explanation of the Enneagram.

It's a personality typing system with nine basic types. They are interrelate and sometimes you have characteristics of multiple types, but for simplicity sake, let's say we're all one of these nine types.

Some trace the Enneagram back to ancient Christian monks, some say elements of the Enneagram cropped up in other world religions – like Judaism and Sufism.

Recently, it's become very popular as a tool for helping to train ministers and other faith leaders. I stumbled upon it in a 3-hour workshop in seminary, before learning about it more in depth through the writings of Richard Rohr and a little book called *The Road Back to You*.

All this is to say, the Enneagram is absolutely part of the mad rush in our current time of personality typing – think Myers Briggs – an obsession with knowing more about ourselves and how we might relate to the world.

But it's also just possible that the Enneagram, with its particularly spiritual bent, and its possible origins in ancient Christianity – has a little something to teach us about humanity and our relationship with the Divine.

Okay. Back to the quick and dirty.

There are nine types. Every single one of us has a little bit of each type within us, but we also all identify with one type in particular.

This has to do with how we relate to others, how we engage the world, how we process information, how we make decisions, what our motivations are, etc, etc.

Each type has a deadly sin associated with it and each type has a virtue. And within each type, there will be patterns you'll fall into when you're in an unhealthy place, an average place, or a healthy place.

I'm not going to give you a breakdown of each type, because that would take all day. This morning, I'm just going to talk to you about sixes.

Now I'm a six. I've avoided claiming that pretty much since I started learning about the Enneagram – but that's a thing too – that type you don't want to be? Probably the type you are.

And here's the really wild thing – most Enneagram teachers, Richard Rohr included, believe sixes make up over half of the world's population.

Sixes are faithful, loyal and dependable. You're likely to find a lot of them in churches, or other institutions. We care about the common good more than any other type on the wheel.

Also, we're really funny. I know – you're wondering why I didn't immediately identify myself as a six!! I'm hilarious.

But with all those virtues also comes the deadly sin.

And here's the part I didn't want to get on board with. The deadly sin of sixes is: anxiety.

Helpful in a world that can be more than a little anxiety-provoking.

We sixes, are the doomsdayers. I've seriously considered whether I should be turning my family's cabin into a bomb shelter.

As Stephen King says, "There no harm in hoping for the best as long as you're prepared for the worst."

Now, healthy sixes are actually some of the most courageous people out there. They actually believe and trust things are going to be alright in the end.

Average sixes put their energy and trust into institutions that protect the common good – our education systems, government, churches, and other family and social service organizations.

Anxiety and worry IS most certainly a feature of their lives, but they don't let it stop them from being in the world.

And unhealthy sixes? Well, they see danger around every corner. Anxiety shifts into paranoia – they don't trust themselves or the world around them. They look to authority figures to make decisions on their behalf.

And as I'm sure you all know – you don't just become the most healthy version of yourself and then stay that way forever, unaffected by the world.

Life happens. Things turn upside down and suddenly, the healthy you of two weeks ago is nowhere to be found.

And I have to say, if there was ever a community of people with more reason to have fallen into unhealthy patterns, than these fleeing Israelites, I don't know who that would be.

Let's review. Enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years, the God of Abraham and Sarah has suddenly heard their cries and sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt into the promised land.

Pharoah's armies have pursued, only to be swallowed up by the Red Sea.

The people have arrived in the desert. Where they will spend 40 years. Not 40 days – which is how long Jesus had to spend in the desert, by the way. 40 YEARS.

And to top it all off, Moses, the guy in charge, the guy with the ear of God, the guy who they trusted, has suddenly disappeared off to the top of a mountain, where no one has heard from him in quite a while.

I can't blame the Israelites for turning to Aaron. For trying to find another authority figure to make some decisions on their behalf – to maybe get them OUT of the desert, for instance.

And I also can't blame them for building the Golden Calf.

For trying to gain access to God – any God – any way they know how. After all, the God for whom they are supposedly the chosen people, let them be enslaved for 400 years and now seems to have abandoned them in the desert.

I can't blame them for trying to strike up a relationship with another God – even if a calf molded from gold seems a little odd to my 21st century sensibilities.

They're trying to find security and safety. A way to assuage their anxieties. A way to believe that everything will turn out right in the end.

It's pretty understandable.

God, of course, doesn't seem to understand it, but clearly God has not been studying the Enneagram or the unhealthy patterns his creation can fall into.

Thankfully – we have Moses, genius that he is, who plays to God's need for an untarnished image. Moses reminds God that killing God's chosen people won't look too good to all those Egyptians.

God comes off as pretty human in this passage.

God overreacts sometimes. God can even change Her mind.

And honestly? A perfect, unchanging, infallible God sounds less interesting to me – it's a relief to me to know even God has His bad days.

Now of course, if you subscribe to this kind of thing God is all the Enneagram types, but I think in Exodus 32, God was having an 8 kind of day.

Church, I'm sorry if this sermon sounded like gibberish to you.

Just remember: it's likely that over HALF of the world's population is made up by sixes.

And that means that over half of the world's people are dealing with a whole lot of anxiety on a regular basis.

And when we're in a heightened state of anxiety – perhaps a place you find yourself in occasionally these days – we don't always make the best decisions.

We choose problematic things to worship. We lose sight of the God who wants abundant life for us and instead we worship the brightest, shiniest thing – no matter how empty it is inside.

We choose to follow leaders who don't have our best interests at heart.

We stopped trusting our own inner compass and search for others to make decisions for us.

What a whole lot of sixes, we are.

It's not easy being a six. Anxiety sucks.

But being a six, learning to live in spite of your anxiety, is an act of courage.

To live everyday with anxiety and to choose instead to focus on trust, courage and hope is an act of defiance.

To struggle to find something to trust and to place our faith in God and our communities and ourselves is an act of love and of courage every single day.

May it be so – for you and for me. Amen.