

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, September 30, 2018
Rev. Dr. David Thompson

Loyalty up and loyalty down

Text: “Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablets of your heart.” Proverbs.

A young boy entered a barber shop and the barber whispered to his customer, “This kid is the most loyal customer I have ever had, but he’s not too smart. Watch while I prove it to you.”

The barber put a dollar bill in one hand and two quarters in the other, then called the boy over and asked, “Which do you want, son?” The boy took the quarters and left.

“What did I tell you?” said the barber. “That kid never learns!”

Later, when the customer left, he saw the same young boy coming out of the ice cream store.

“Hey, son! May I ask you a question? Why did you take the quarters instead of the dollar bill?”

The boy licked his cone and replied:

“Because the day I take the dollar the game is over!”

During the Second World War, Lord Mountbatten was Captain of the British destroyer the Mohawk. Four ships had been blown up at the mouth of the River Tyne. It was thought that they had been torpedoed. The Mohawk was ordered to the scene to destroy the subs. Mountbatten immediately obeyed the order to put the Mohawk under steam towards the Tyne. But then he got on the telephone to The Admiral of the Fleet and said: “Look sir, I don’t think those ships have been torpedoed. We shall be much too late when we get there, and the scent will be stale. If it’s a minefield, it will be dangerous to go there until it has been cleared. Can you get the order cancelled?”

The reply came back. “Don’t bellyache, get on with your orders.”

Mountbatten who believed in being loyal to his commander, obeyed and took the Mohawk straight into the minefield. A mine grated along the bottom of the ship and finally exploded between the propellers. The whole ship was shaken, everyone was knocked off their feet and there they were, stuck in the middle of a minefield. A tug came and hauled the Mohawk home stern first.

Question: Was Mountbatten right to be loyal to his commander when he thought the commander was wrong?

During that incident a young seaman gave way to panic. He deserted his post in time of war... the penalty was death.

Brought up before Mountbatten, the seaman was asked if he knew what the punishment was?

“Yes, sir!”

“What is it?” Mountbatten asked.

“Death,” the seaman replied.

Mountbatten said “ It is. Case remanded. Clear lower deck.”

Then Mountbatten addressed the whole ship’s company:

“You have just been through a harrowing experience, being mined. Out of 260 men, 259 behaved as I expected. One did not. One left his post. This is a most serious offence in time of war, and you may be surprised that I propose letting him off with a caution, or rather two cautions:

One to him, and one to myself for having failed to impress myself sufficiently in three months on all of you, for you to know that I would never tolerate such behaviour. Nobody will ever again leave his post. I will never give the order to abandon ship. The only way we will ever leave this ship is if she sinks under our feet.

The result of that incident is that Mountbatten received absolute loyalty from his crew, including the pardoned able seaman.

It wasn’t long before Mountbatten’s words were tested. He was given command of The Kelly, The Kashmir and the Kipling flotilla. On a mission the Kelly was sunk, and Mountbatten stayed aboard until the water closed over his head. He surfaced just missing the churning propellers. He put his wounded men into a life raft while he swam outside. Miraculously a ship appeared and began to pick up survivors. Mountbatten got aboard and demanded that all survivors be picked up before the ship left the zone. It became a cat and mouse game, as bombers strafed the ships and the life rafts. This went on for some two hours. Finally, the staff officers came to Mountbatten and asked if they couldn’t call it a day. All of one ship’s survivors were aboard, as well as ½ of the other ship’s men. The staff officers argued that it was only a matter of time before they received a direct hit in which case they would lose 600 lives.

Mountbatten said no. They would stay for the last survivor. Another hour went by. The staff officers came again with the same argument, but with greater urgency.

Mountbatten said, “ It would be better for us all to sink together, rather than leave any of our flotilla mates struggling in the water without any hope of being saved.”

In the end, with decks completely overloaded with survivors, Mountbatten and the last survivor headed back to Alexandria.

What Mountbatten had demonstrated was an example of Loyalty Up, Loyalty Down...a navy phrase. It meant that the lowest able seaman must be loyal right up to the Admiral of the fleet and the converse would also be true. The Admiral must be loyal to the lowest ranking seaman. Any seaman knew that if he served on a Mountbatten ship, his captain would be there for him...REGARDLESS!

He would never be abandoned to the sea to watch his mates sail away to safety while he perished. For this Mountbatten’s men gave him total loyalty.

In the gospel lesson today, we read of Christ’s questions to Peter: “Do you love me?” The question is asked three times to Peter’s growing upset and deep embarrassment. Why? Because Peter, under pressure, had abandoned his post. In the arrest and trial of Jesus, Peter had denied Christ three times before the cock had crowed that day. Simply put, Peter had failed to give “loyalty up.”

But after the test, Christ predicts that Peter will be loyal in the test of his own death. He would not deny his lord and would die for it. St. Peter would overcome his fear.

I think that we can learn a lot both from Judas who betrayed Jesus and Peter who denied relationship.

Judas felt that Jesus was doing the wrong thing by denying political power and therefore Judas felt right in betraying Christ. Judas believed in a military Messiah and perhaps thought he could force Jesus' hand.

Peter was afraid for his own skin and therefor denied Christ.

I think that we are not so different. What do you do if you think that the boss is wrong? Do we still give loyalty up? What if you think that the boss is right, but you become afraid- do you still give loyalty up?

I find Mountbatten's experience helpful because he faced down those two temptations. Notice that in giving loyalty up he obeys the orders but feels free to question them.

Edward R. Murrow once said: "We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty." Murrow was right. Principled dissent can be absolutely loyal! Mountbatten obeyed the orders and sailed to fulfill them after he got his no. However, when he got to the minefield and discovered that he was right, everything changed. Now he was in charge because he had better information than the Admiral. The dynamic changed because Mountbatten also had to be loyal down to his men.

Twice his officers pleaded with him. Twice they voiced dissent but then they returned to their posts. What bound them together was Mountbatten's loyalty down to the last able seaman. That cut it. It was one for all and all for one.

All of us are tested daily. Are we going to be loyal to our spouse, our friend, our boss, our work mates, our employees and our subordinates? What if we think that they are wrong and on an unwise course?

When I find myself in a really tough situation to figure out, I ask myself this question: What is the most loving thing to do all things considered?

This is what I have found over a lifetime: Love is an excellent guide and fear a very poor one. Love is not only stronger than fear, it is also wiser. There is a way to talk to your boss, your spouse, your friend, your supervisor your HR department, your work mate, that is loving. Love can combine dissent and still be loyal! We who work in Churches can learn this together and then practice it.

John DeVito was in the World Trade center when the planes hit. He was on the 87th floor. He was CEO of a group of 14 people. As CEO he knew he needed to give direction. But what was he to do? He was at a loss. Should he stay to guard company property?

One of his employees was already ripping up his shirt, passing out strips to use as face masks. Suddenly reality got through to John DeVito **Get your people out of the building.**

He ran to his desk called his wife, told her he loved her and his girls, grabbed a bottle of water and got his 14 employees to put on their facial masks. Some looked undecided.

“Everybody let’s go!” John shouted. “Not to the elevators! Stay single file. Put your hand on each other’s shoulders and hang on to the one in front.” The 14 formed a chain and started down, floor after floor filled with twisted steel and billowing smoke.

The stairway ended at floor 78. It was a transfer floor. People were milling around, looking for another stairway down. It was pandemonium- choking dust- hundreds looking for an exit. The 14-member human chain broke up. By the time John had located the stairs he had lost track of several of his employees. “Go ahead” he said to the main body, I’ll stay and look for them.”

A faithful employee pulled his arm, “John don’t be foolish. Think of your wife and girls. The building is on fire!”

Eventually John DeVito got out. Why? He had paid attention to someone who was giving loyalty up, who cared about him and his family.

That employee’s loyal dissent saved John DeVito’s life And John DeVito had the sense to listen to his loyal employee.

When Christ encountered Peter after the resurrection he was interested in only one thing: Did Peter love him or not?

Why?

Because Christ knew that if Peter really loved him, that love would overcome all his fears, allowing for “Loyalty Up.”

So, it is with all of us If we can offer loyal love to everyone, we will discover loyalty up and loyalty down.

Rabindranath Tagore once wrote: “ He who want to do good knocks at the gate; he who loves, finds the door open.”

Why?

Because Love is the sacred key to all relationships. Love will give us all loyalty all the way up to God and all the way down even to the enemy!

And what a surprise it is, when we love all the way down to our enemies, that we find even there **THAT THE DOOR IS OPEN!**