

Christopher Scott Campbell, *infant in Christ*, I speak to you with *solid food* for which you are not ready, with difficult, meat-and-potatoes words from Jesus that are hard even for us adults to swallow.

Jesus beckons all of us together to high standards, some say impossible standards, taking familiar rules and ratcheting them up in the direction of God's noble intentions.

Jesus pushes us beyond following rules (while looking for loopholes) to fostering relationships, always looking for newer and deeper and more dangerous ways to love.

There are too many specifics here for us to cover even in the barstool Bible study tonight much less in the sermon this morning, delicate and difficult stuff about divorce and anger and hellfire and self-mutilation and the devil's campaign to make us all say OMG, so instead, for now, I point you and your nervous parents and godparents away from the trees to look first at the forest.

The specifics will be there to inspire and haunt you the length of your days; to begin, look at the bigger picture.

Jesus starts with Torah, the teaching which Moses set before the people as the way of life which, in his own sermon on the mount, in the final chapters of Deuteronomy, and in the final chapters of his own life, he implored God's people to choose.

This teaching was designed to set them apart from everyone else, to make them different than other nations where slavery and exploitation and violence and corruption were the norm.

God was calling this ragged group of freshly liberated former slaves to higher standards, a better society, a community of freedom and mutual respect that would enlighten the world.

Under the thumb of imperial Rome, which suffered no such delusions of daily ethical grandeur, the scribes and Pharisees kept alive the traditions with vigorous debate and interpretation.

Jesus was part of this great conversation, but he didn't much care for the disconnect between the law school classroom conversation and the smarmy behavior of the lawyers themselves.

Jesus, therefore, raised the bar, upped the ante.

*You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you.*

Christopher, Christ-bearer, this is the one you are baptized into, the Jesus you are being called to follow and imitate and proclaim.

He is calling you and all of us to higher standards.

Why?

We heard the reason just last week: *You are the salt of the earth....you are the light of the world.*

The mission of God, the cause of love deep enough to be named justice, the cause of truth real enough to be named righteousness, the mission of God to embrace and bless and heal and save the world, is a high, some say impossible calling.

You, Christopher, and you, Resurrection, are invited to participate, but understand, because this mission of God is so difficult and so important, the standards and expectations for those called to carry it forward are lofty indeed.

Branch Rickey understood this.

Mr. Rickey, a devout Methodist, was the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers in the 1940s, a decade before the Montgomery bus boycotts and the subsequent, slow racial repentance of America that we are still working to complete.

He brought in a young, wildly talented, second baseman for an interview, an African American man named Jackie Robinson.

Mr. Rickey grilled Mr. Robinson for three hours, screamed at him, swore at him, got up in his grill and threatened to smack him, all to test his response.

Finally, Robinson said, "Mr. Rickey, do you want a ballplayer who's afraid to fight back?"

Rickey replied, "I want a ballplayer with guts enough *not* to fight back."

Higher causes demand higher standards.

The world God loves is overrun with racism and violence, with anger and hypocrisy and easy divorce and casual speech, with multiplying rules and dividing relationships, where unfair rules are enforced but real people are treated like disposable diapers.

This dark, tasteless world starves and aches for fresh salt and light.

Christopher, infant in Christ, that's you.

Resurrection, children of God, that's you.

And Jesus seems to think that you can do it.

Hard as it was, some said impossible, Jackie Robinson did it, with support from his white teammates and from Mr. Rickey, who gave him instructional literature on non-violence, including Matthew chapter 5.

The good news is that these startling statements of Jesus are made with a southern drawl, so when he says, *But I say to you*, he more accurately says, *But I say to y'all*.

These high standards are given to, and supported by, community: we share the load of bearing light, the heavy burden of being salt.

Together, you can do it, and you will.

Except when you don't.

There are times, of course, we fall short of these standards, times we singular and we plural choose death over life, because it's easier or more attractive.

There are times we fight back, fire back with our verbal haymakers, fall back into behavior utterly indistinct from the bland, broken world around us.

Those are the times when the good news becomes even better news.

The good news we were supposed to carry to the world carries us.

The forgiveness and reconciliation we failed to offer is offered to us.

Jesus answers the prayer attributed to Barry White: *practice what you preach*.

Jesus takes the high road, making the impossible climb with a cross on his back, the same cross we trace on Christopher's front.

In that cross we see with inspiring and haunting clarity the depth of God's love, the twisted shape of justice deep enough to be named mercy, the strange and brutal beauty of reconciliation, of wrong somehow made right.

Christopher and Resurrection, children of God, you are marked with the cross of Christ forever.

It will weigh you down; it is a heavy load to carry.

And it will lift you up and carry you.