

“Beware the Lotus!”

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37

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I'm sure many of us are familiar with the movie *Hidden Figures*. If you haven't seen it, it's excellent. It's based on the true story of black women working for NASA during the space race. Before super computers, these women were doing very complicated calculations at the same level as men but were being treated like second-class citizens. Or even worse.

There's a pivotal scene where some important decisions are to be made and one of the women, who in real life was a Presbyterian elder by the way, wants to attend. Her immediate supervisor says No. She can't. “There's no precedent for a woman at this meeting.” There's no precedent for a woman at this meeting? Fortunately, the man's supervisor intervenes, and she goes to the meeting. And of course, she solves all the tricky math problems with aplomb and panache. It's a wonderful scene.

Now, of course, things are different. We know women are every bit as smart as men and can do virtually every job a man can do. We have had several women serve as moderators of our General Assembly, the highest elected office in our denomination. They all did fine jobs.

I was at the General Assembly some years ago when we were addressed by the Chief of Naval Chaplains, the highest-ranking chaplain in the Navy and Marine Corps. It's a two-star position, a Rear Admiral. The Chief of Naval Chaplains was a woman.

Fifty, sixty years ago, women were just as smart as men and just as capable as men, but they weren't allowed to show it. “Women have never done that before. There's no precedent for a woman doing that.” We got lulled into a way of thinking and acting towards women and never questioned if it the right.

It's not just women, of course. Periodically society looks at itself and asks if the old ways are necessarily the best ways. Smoking used to be normal. Most everybody did it. Then we realized it was bad for us. Just because people had smoked for centuries didn't mean it was a good thing to do.

The first cars came without safety belts. It took years before safety belts were included in cars and even more years before they were mandatory. Just because our parents and grandparents didn't have to wear a safety belt doesn't mean it was a good idea. It was a bad idea. They just didn't know it.

Until 1967, an interracial couple could not marry. It was against the law. Now, we realize that was not righteous. People who love each other should be allowed to marry. It was wrong to keep them apart. But it was the way things were done.

Change is hard. We get used to one way of doing things and we want it to stay that way. We want things to be the way they've always been.

But do we ever ask ourselves, is this pleasing to God? Is this way of thinking and acting, is this what God wants? We thought it was OK back then, but was it OK with God back then? Did God think it was righteous back then?

Our attitudes and behaviors now, we think they're OK. But are they OK with God? Shouldn't we be examining what we think and do and asking if it's OK with God? Shouldn't we be examining what we think and do and asking if it's OK with God?

This is Jesus' point in our Scripture lesson. 'Moses gave you laws that seemed OK back then. But that was then. This is now. I'm calling you to a new way of living.

'Moses said one thing about anger. But I say another. Moses said one thing about adultery. But I say, there's another way of

looking at it. The law says one thing about divorce and swearing an oath. But I say, there's a higher righteousness.'

Jesus is calling us all to be constantly growing, constantly striving for righteousness. But it's so easy to be lulled into doing the same old things, in the same old ways.

How many of us are familiar with Percy Jackson? Do you know these stories? They're an adventure series written for Middle School and Jr High, but I like them. Percy Jackson is a half-blood. His mother works in a candy store in NY City, but his father is Poseidon, the Greek God of the sea. Percy and his friends go on a quest to find something stolen from the gods. It's convoluted, but along the way they stop in Las Vegas at the Lotus Hotel and Casino, a place "You'll never want to leave."

They go inside and it's fantastic. Free food. Good music. Games they can play. They're having a great time until one of them asks, 'How long have we been here?' 'I don't know, half an hour?' They check, and realize it's been three days. Three days! Of course, when they try leaving they have to fight their way out. But they get away and the adventure continues. Like I say, they're fun stories.

If you remember your Greek mythology from High School, you know the story. The lotus eaters. At the end of the Trojan War, Odysseus and his men get on their boat to go back home. On the way they stop at an island for food and water. Some of the men eat the local plants that look like a lotus.

But when they eat the plants, they don't want to do anything. They forget about their families and loved ones. They don't care about the future. All they want is to stay on the Island and eat lotus.

It's easy to be lulled by the lotus. "That's the way I was raised. We've always done it this way. We've never done that before. Everyone else does it. It's no big deal." That, my friends, is the

lotus talking. Each and every time. That is the lotus talking.
Beware the lotus.

The good news of God is we Christians are not static in our faith. We are meant to be examining and thinking and growing. It's what God does for us. God helps us grow in faith. What did Paul say in our Epistle lesson? "I planted. Apollos watered. But it was God who gave the growth." God wants us to grow in faith.

My friends, don't eat the lotus. Choose life. Choose growth. Let us examine ourselves and grow in righteousness. Let us examine ourselves and grow in righteousness.

Think of our hot-button issues. Abortion. Transgender rights. Christian nationalism. Animals farmed on an industrial scale. Trigger warnings on news content, on Bible content. These are divisive issues, but the worst thing we can do is ignore them. "We've never done that before. There's no precedent for that. We're righteous enough. We don't need to grow in faith. I don't want to talk about it." That's the lotus talking. Beware the lotus.

My dear ones, beware the lotus. Stay away from the lotus of indifference. The lotus of neglect. The lotus of sleepy contentment with the status quo. The flower is beautiful, and the taste is sweet. But it won't help us grow in faith.

Instead, my beloved, may we all be like Jesus, seeking the higher righteousness, growing in faith, and being more and more the people God wants us to be. Please, choose life, not lotus.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.