

My son could hardly wait. His big Christmas present was a snowboard. He'd been "practicing" in the living room. Strapped to the board, he envisioned himself schussing down the slope. He looked like nothing so much as one of those green, plastic toy soldiers stuck forever in one position. "You know," I said. "This isn't going to be like skiing. You should probably take a lesson while you're there."

"Mom," he said, full of teenage bravado and confidence. "How hard could this be?"

It turned out that the board was a bit more of a challenge than Kevin planned on. There were a few frustrating moments and more than a few falls. He got it eventually, but it took awhile.

This morning, we're going to welcome Anna Katherine into the body of Christ that is incorporated here at Redeemer. I'm prepared for a little push back based on the utter despair we experienced when I tried to hold her this week. But, her parents and godparents will make their promises. The congregation will make its promise. I'll apply water, oil, and prayers.

How hard can it be to have a relationship with God?

If our readings this morning are any indication, it can be plenty hard.

Job's relationship with God involves incredible loss. Job loses his wealth, his health, and finally, his children. His friends give him no comfort. His wife gives him no comfort. He is one miserable human. Today, he's ready to give it all up. "If only I could vanish in darkness," he says.

Next week, God answers. Spoiler alert: Job doesn't exactly encounter sweet, pastoral G-D. It's not an easy conversation.

The psalmist also is having one of those no-good-very-bad days. How bad was it? We read this psalm on Good Friday. The saddest day of the Christian year.

In a gospel that seems tailor-made for pledge season, Jesus tells a devout young man that to have eternal life he must give up everything he has. "Sell it all and follow me." Jeepers, I thought tithing was hard!

According to the writer of the epistle, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Really - the word of God a sharp two-edged sword? Well, I guess the young man in the gospel probably felt that way. He was following the rules.

Remember, Jesus loved the young man. Unlike Job, there is no question about the feelings here. The young man knew the commandments and was living by them: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother. Nowhere in there was "give me all your money." Why would Jesus make such a demand to a pious, good Jewish man who just wants to go to heaven? Shouldn't being a good person be enough? Jesus says we have to be more than good. We have to be "all in".

All In. Like the pig at a ham and egg breakfast.

The chicken's involved. The pig's committed.

Jesus wanted the young man's commitment. God wants those created in God's image to do more than just follow rules. God wants our hearts. Because when you give your heart to something, you're more likely to risk everything for it. You're able to be "all in".

Considering all of this, I realize how appropriate these readings actually are for a baptism.

In the covenant we are about to recite, we give our hearts - credo - to the belief in the Trinity. Because we give our hearts, we choose to make 5 promises as to how we will live our lives. They are difficult promises - promises we cannot hope to fulfill without God's help.

- We promise to keep gathering together in community to pray and study.
- We promise to repent of our sins - OUR sins, not someone else's.
- We promise to share the story of Jesus and the good news that the Kingdom of God is near.

- We promise to help bring that Kingdom to fruition by seeking Christ in absolutely everyone and to work for justice and respect the dignity of every human being. And, the way we do that is to be sure no one goes hungry, no one is homeless, no one is lonely.

These promises proclaim to our families, our neighborhoods, our governments that Jesus is our Lord. It is He we will follow first. Christ before governing structures. Christ before schools or social conventions. Christ before our relatives. Oh, the Word of God - made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth - is definitely a two-edged sword. It may cost some of us a friend or two. It cost Jesus his life.

In spite of the risk, we will baptize Anna Katherine today. We will promise to support her in her life as a Christian. And, God helping all of us, we will continue our journeys.

One step at a time.

How hard is that?