

Because these are the type of people we are, my family and a couple of our friends have a fantasy football league together. We've been playing in some iteration of the group for ten years, and because of that it's created some traditions that are sacrosanct. One of those that has developed is a steady *not allowed to be drafted* list. It mostly existed between my sisters and I, but most of us tend to follow it due to the unwritten rule we have all created in our minds when it comes to how we build our teams.

While there can be little doubt that we all love football and are always ready and raring for the NFL season to kickoff, we all also know that, like with most sports in this country, it comes with complications. Without fail, every season there is at least one story of physical abuse or some other abhorrent behavior from a player, which causes them to be investigated by the league and then usually, ultimately, pushed a bit under the rug because these players make the owners a ton of money and revenue is the most important thing in this world for a lot of people.

A couple of years ago...though I am loathe to admit it...I broke the not allowed to be drafted rule. I get extremely competitive and so when I saw an opportunity to hopefully make my team better, I took it. There sat round after round of our draft...Adrian Peterson. Fresh off an offseason which had brought to light less than pretty allegations about his treatment of

his kids. Finally, after much hemming and hawing, I pushed the draft button, and the response was immediate. Our chat going crazy from Jennifer and Kristin, “*Tina!!! WHY???*” I knew it was a bad decision, but in the name of competition I chose to ignore it.

Well, karma came back to bite me week one of the season. I was in a position to need a Monday night comeback, and all of my hopes hinged on Peterson’s performance. I needed two points. *Two points!* To win. I thought I had it in the bag. Well...drive after drive the negative yards racked up, until finally, Adrian Peterson left the game with an injury, not to return for the majority of the season. I lost that game by one point. *One!* And after the game, my sisters texted me the inevitable...see what happens when you draft the not nice guy?!

It was a stark lesson in why we have the not allowed to be drafted list, because it was a reminder that as much as we would maybe like to, you cannot always separate off the field behavior from on the field performance. You have to take things as the entire package, not compartmentalizing everything into separate, discrete boxes that we can pick and choose when we ignore and when we bring out in the open. There has to be a time to consider the whole and sometimes that time is fantasy football and sometimes that time is when one is confronted with a conversation as

maddening as one about whether or not people should wash their hands before they eat dinner.

It's been a little while since we've been in Mark's gospel, so we need a bit of a reminder of what has been going on in Jesus and the disciples' lives since last we were with them in this narrative. We're about midway through Jesus' ministry in Mark, and things are starting to move at a bit of a breakneck pace. John the Baptist has been murdered, Jesus has fed the 5,000 and walked on water, and overall, his reputation as a healer and a teacher has started to spread exponentially throughout Galilee. It has spread far enough that it has caught the attention of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, so even though Jesus is continuing to operate in northern Galilee through the town and villages along the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee, leaders from Jerusalem have decided that it is finally time for them to travel north and see what all this Jesus fuss is about, and what they find infuriates them.

They happen upon Jesus and the disciples getting ready to sit down to a meal, and they notice something strange...the disciples aren't washing their hands before they settle in to eat. Now, from our 21st century perspective, we might be inclined to be on the side of the scribes and Pharisees here, particularly in this the year of our Lord Covid. Hand sanitation is vital and so we might be like, umm, yeah, the disciples need to

wash their hands before they eat, especially since they're probably eating with their fingers for the most part. They're hot, sweaty, dusty fisherman, yeah, eww, wash your hands! But the issue at hand here isn't sanitation or basic human hygiene. The issue here...is purity.

The Pharisees and scribes are the ones who are in charge of looking at how the Law has been interpreted through the generations and helping interpret and apply the Law to the current times. They're the ones in charge of maintaining adherence to the Law, particularly those laws around purity, and so they latch onto this little detail with Jesus and the disciples and they run with it for all it's worth. See!! This man is encouraging turning your back on the Law, on God, on everything we stand for! This one little thing is enough for the Pharisees to declare that Jesus isn't really a man of faith, a man of God, because how dare he just ignore something as vitally important as making sure that they are pure and clean before they sit down to a meal?

Jesus, frankly, doesn't have time for this, whatsoever. He's not ignorant. He's seen the world around him, he knows what his siblings are experiencing, he knows that this proclamation to strict adherence to the Law is nothing short of a really blatant display of raging hypocrisy. The Pharisees want to go on and on about following the Law, but...the Law also calls for feeding the hungry, caring for the widow, the orphan, and the alien,

for not letting anyone be in need among them. Jesus looks around at the economic and political complex the Pharisees have helped build and all he can do is see the obvious fact that they aren't focusing on the right thing. Policing the purity laws and getting all up in arms about someone's hand hygiene is a really easy way to make it *seem* like you're following what God has called you to because it *is* part of the Law, but the Pharisees have also turned it into a front for covering up the multitude of other sins they're ignoring or committing themselves.

Jesus seizes the opportunity to point out that if they're so worried about whether or not the disciples' hands are clean then they need to also be concerned about the things that they are allowing to defile their own hearts. They need to look inward to what needs to be cleansed before they start pointing fingers outwardly at what others are doing. They turn a blind eye to greed and pride and every kind of wickedness that is allowed to run rampant because it feeds the system of Empire that allows them to keep their pockets lined and keep their lives comfortable, but sure the most important thing is whether or not the guys who follow Jesus are keeping their hands clean.

Whenever the Pharisees run up against Jesus we're also inclined to demonize them and pass judgment which is, frankly, easier than looking in the mirror and realizing that more often than not in these scenarios we *are*

the Pharisees. What they're doing here is the quintessential move of the 21st century Christian. We have cherry picked our way through Jesus' words, found the ones we like and want to enforce so that we can then ignore the ones we really don't like, and still have the ability to point at ourselves and say, yes, but *I* love Jesus more than you. *I* go to church, *I* pray, *I* follow the 10 Commandments...most of the time. Well...at least I haven't killed anyone! And look at all these *other people*, people who don't seem to care about church or who display their faith in a different way or who are *criminals*. Surely, Jesus will want to deal with them, that has nothing to do with me, look at my gold star list of church achievements.

Clearly, Jesus won't care about the rant I just put on Facebook about refugees from Afghanistan. Jesus won't care about the fact that I don't care about any of the people at the border because they're all criminals and drug dealers anyone, plus they aren't doing things the *right* way. Jesus won't care that I perpetually ignore that one person's phone calls and texts because well they just ticked me off ten years ago and I can't stand them. Jesus won't care that every time I drive by one of *those people* on the corners I wonder why they can't just get a job and the city really needs to do something about all of this because it's just not safe. Jesus won't care that I secretly feel pity for my friend whose kid is LGBTQ because well...there is just so much to

deal with there. Jesus won't care that I wonder why we always have to be talking about race when it really isn't that big of a deal.

It's really easy to pick and choose which words of Jesus we want to heed, while justifying in our heads all the reasons why it's ok to do that. We try to ignore the fact that we are very much the people James is talking about in his letter. We're content to be hearers of the word, but don't you dare ask us to be doers because that's just hard, and we're going to keep the bar as low as possible. I'll come to church 50% of the time and we're going to call that good. Don't ask me to love or serve my neighbor, that's too much and did Jesus *really* care about that? Yes...he did. And it's high time we stop trying to separate our faith and our actions, like our faith is the only thing that matters. Our faith is meant to deeply inform all of our actions. We are called to live out the word of God, to love and serve others, to care for the world God made, and strive to be people that just...care, deeply, empathetically, compassionately. Declaring you have faith and then living as though that faith doesn't inform every part of your life is nothing short of Pharisaic hypocrisy. We can't be one person here in this space and another person out in the world. It doesn't work like that. Anywhere. And if we believe that...I fear that may put us on a not allowed to be drafted list.

AMEN!!!