



**November 19, 2006**

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Matthew 6:25-33

## “KISS: Keep it Simple, Sweetie”

We are often helped in life by special “tips” that give us a simple way to understand or accomplish a complicated thing.

After several emotional and unsuccessful attempts at having my dad teach her how to drive, my mother finally paid for driving school. She told and retold the “tip” that did the trick for her: ***Keep your eyes on the center line all the way out to the horizon; and aim for it in the distance.***

I learned to water ski at a summer camp when I was in college. The tip that got me on my feet was simple: ***Keep your elbows straight no matter what.***

Growing up in France, my husband learned lots of tips he swears by. Although I have never, in 36 years of marriage, observed him follow this one- he shares it regularly with friends who have a cold or the flu: ***Go home. Fill a glass with rum. Put in a lot of sugar, some hot water and a little lemon juice. Drink it straight down, go directly to bed, pile the covers on and sleep as long as you can.*** I’ve often wondered if this helps folks shake a bug, or if they are just so dopey they don’t care anymore.

There are tips on how to golf, how to save money, how to invest your money, how to get ink stains out of white shirts and how to get gum out of hair (use peanut butter- I promise it works!)

These are all helpful and appreciated. However, life is complicated. Life is full of challenges. Life is confusing. These little tips just help us handle PIECES of life. Could there be a “tip” for life itself???--A principle that we could focus on?--Something easy to remember?

I believe Jesus gives us a “tip” for life in the Scripture from Matthew today. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard about the “KISS” principle—it’s an acronym: K I S S. It stands for “Keep it simple, stupid”. Now, I have amended that saying, because Jesus would never call anyone “stupid”. His words DO tell us to “keep it simple”, but I think he’d call us “sweetie” or “sport” or some other affectionate (or much “cooler”) term. Keep it simple, sport. Keep it simple, sweetie.

So what’s this tip for life Jesus brings? *Make what God cares about the most important thing in your life.* Everything else will fall into place when you do that. Jesus is calling us to find a FOCUS for life, to keep our eyes on that point of focus. When we do this, what seems complicated becomes simple. It’s like my mom learning to drive--- when she tried to pay attention to everything on the road, along the road, beside the road, she was a mess. But when her focus was clearly on the center line way out ahead of her, driving became simple.

So many things are like this. To water ski, to play a sport, to sing, to play an instrument, to work with wood, to paint and draw, to knit or sew, you MUST learn to focus. When you lose focus, everything falls apart.

Jesus says we’re to “strive for the kingdom of God”. Focus on what God cares about. So, what does God care about? All Jesus’ stories about the kingdom of God show a God of grace. God’s like a shepherd who leaves his flock to find and save the lost lamb. God’s like a father who runs to embrace his wayward son, returning home after squandering his inheritance. God’s like a woman who lost a coin and sweeps her house from top to bottom until she finds it. God’s like all those people—and when he finds what is lost he calls everyone together to have a party of celebration.

Jesus says, “Here’s my tip for life: Put what God cares about FIRST, and much that is complicated will become simple.” Live in love and grace. Love God. Love everyone—especially those who are lost. Make that your focus.

Friends, our culture has wandered so far from this message of simplicity we are overwhelmed with life’s complexity. I’m reading a fascinating book by Mary Pipher called *In the shelter of each* other in which she compares family life of the past with family life today. She describes her maternal grandparents, who went to eastern Colorado as homesteaders in 1913. They had a tough life- they and their children labored hard to make a living from that arid land. But they worked **alongside** each other facing **common** enemies of weather, sickness, economic hardships. Their love was something like that of soldiers who have shared a foxhole. They were allies, working towards the same ends.

Pipher contrasts this with struggles families face today. Our enemies aren’t so easy to define. Some cultural voices pit us AGAINST each other. Our culture encourages young people to think poorly of their parents. Parents are clueless, hopeless, control-

obsessed obstacles to happiness. In her counseling practice she gently tells teens not all cultures are like this. She shares, for example, she's known Asian teens who have puzzled over this, saying, "I love my mother and father. They gave me life. Why would I treat them badly?"

Pipher points out the pressures on parents- job demands, time demands. She makes simple suggestions that seem to make a difference to many families:

-Designate two or three nights each week "unplugged" nights. This means no computers, telephones, Ipods, Mp3 players, television, DVD's even CD's. And- the whole family spends at least one hour in the same room together on every "unplugged" night.

- Do one outdoor activity as a family every week.

Would these simple changes be in line with Jesus' tip for life- ***Love God; love everyone?*** I think so! God cares about our love for each other – more than our jobs, more than our incomes, more than our possessions, more than grades in school, more than sports trophies. Our family circles, our friendship circles—what better place to start changing our focus from the world's values to God's values?

A lot of the time we are NOT focused on God or on what God cares about.

This raises fears for our security, which Jesus was talking about in today's lesson. Many of us live by the saying, "Why pray when you can worry?" Richard Foster, author of the classic book on Christian formation, ***Celebration of Discipline*** says that our fears and anxieties can lead us to an insane attachment to things. He writes, `

Our stories of heroes are "rags to riches" stories—about the poor boy who becomes rich. We don't tell the story of St. Francis of Assisi, who voluntarily gave up great wealth to live simply and serve Christ.

Jesus wants to free us from our anxieties. He wants us to keep it simple, sweetie. He wants us to know that as we put what God cares about FIRST in our lives, there will be all the "Lilies of the Field Boutique"s we need to keep us clothed and comfortable.

Dear friends,

When we think everything we have, we have gotten by our own efforts;

When we think what we have we must hold onto and preserve single- handedly;

When we think what we have is only for ourselves and not for others,

**WE WILL LIVE IN CONSTANT ANXIETY AND STRESS.**

When we know that everything we have is a gift from God;

When we know God will guide us in caring for what we have;

When we know it's available for others, when and where God directs us;

AND WE KNOW GOD WILL LOVE AND CARE FOR US IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES NOW AND THROUGH ETERNITY, we are freed to live simply, without anxiety or fear.

Put what God cares about FIRST in your life, then much that is complicated becomes simple.

For many years I wrestled with a "complicated" yearning. I wanted our family to have a real home—a place where we would raise our children, and then send them forth to build their own lives. In over 36 years of marriage my husband and I moved often- to this day the longest we have ever lived at one address is seven years! This was true even prior to my becoming a church pastor. Then, of course, after I became a pastor, I knew we would live in church owned parsonages throughout my ministry.

This used to bring me pain. I'd drive through neighborhoods at night, drawn to the warm glow of lighted windows in the houses I passed. I LONGED for a home. Then God spoke to my heart. "You have a home!" he said. "You have a home you will never lose, no matter what." I came to understand that my HOME is found in the relationships of love in my life. The relationship of love I share with GOD is my home; the relationships of love that connect me to friends and family members are my home. I began to see that what the world says is important, isn't important at all.

Put what God cares about FIRST in your life, then much that is complicated becomes simple.

Seeking God's kingdom, for me, consists of embracing life, love, connection and goodness.

In an argument with a neighbor over a noisy dog, or proliferation of weeds, we wonder, "What shall I do?" Look for an opportunity to share life, love, connection, goodness.

Your daughter finds six thousand different ways to avoid doing her homework. You agonize, "What shall I do?" Look for an opportunity to share life, love, connection, goodness.

You have a chance to make a better salary, but it will require longer hours. You wonder, “What shall I do?” Look for an opportunity to share life, love, connection, goodness.

I’m not saying any of us should let a neighbor be irresponsible, or a daughter neglect her homework. I’m not saying salary considerations have no place in a Christian life. I’m saying our FOCUS in ALL CIRCUMSTANCES is to be on what God cares about FIRST, before all else. Our responses to life’s challenges need to be rooted in love.

Make what God cares about the most important thing in your life. Keep your focus. Keep it simple. It’s not as hard as we might expect. It gets easier with practice. With God’s own Spirit guiding, we can do this. So be it. Amen.