

Our question in Matthew's gospel today is from the Pharisees, but this isn't the beginning of Jesus' examination panel. The Sadducees just asked him a question about marriage and resurrection and 7 brothers and one wife that sounds more like an algebra problem than a theological one. And after Jesus handles that, it's the Pharisee's turn. Jesus sure has the ultimate in challenging candidacy committees. "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" they ask. There were, of course, over 600 laws to choose from.

Perhaps they thought they had finally stumped Jesus. But Jesus looks them right in the eye and answers. *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.* Okay, let's be honest; Jesus cheats a little. He sneaks a whole lot into one commandment: your heart (your blood, life force, love, aching), your soul (passion, essence, spirit), and your mind (thoughts, intellect, doubts, questions). And then he adds a second, but says it's like the first one, so not really separate – love your neighbor as yourself. Your heart, soul, mind and neighbor. It's beautiful and messy and God wants it all. This is the greatest commandment.

These commandments are only possible, of course, because God has loved us first. Perhaps that would have been Jesus' answer if the question had been, which promise of God is the greatest? Or what did God do to make all this love possible? But so quickly we want to know what we need to do, rather than what's already being done. We want to know if we pass the test, if we got the answer to the question right.

Jeanie, you have been through lots of examinations, and answered lots of questions, as you've prepared for ordained ministry. Seminary questions, candidacy interviews, CPE supervisor panels, your own internal wonderings. Maybe you've felt put on the spot, too, trying to distill 600 thoughts into one sentence. Trying to prove you have what it takes in the face of an ongoing stream of questions, others as well as your own.

Sorry to say, Jeanie, but there are more questions for you today, but.....*the answers are printed in the bulletin!* "I will and I ask God to help me" – because it's bigger than you can comprehend, more than you can do, and you need God's help. I was reading a blog by Nadia Boltz-Weber, Very Famous Lutheran in some circles. She posted an ordination sermon with the brilliant title: "Sermon for Ordination: You Don't Have What It Takes — But You Have a God Who Does."

The Sadducees and Pharisees are trying to trip Jesus up, to make him look like he doesn't have what it takes. They were trying to get Jesus to think small – just 1 commandment, just boil it down, fit it into this little box that we can carry around for safe keeping. Or maybe even more, wanting to fit Jesus into a little box, so they could guard it, guard him, monitor him for safe keeping, keep a lid on him.

We are all asked, coerced, tempted, even sometimes eager to fit into smaller and smaller boxes in our relationships, in our jobs, in our family. Maybe to make things easier, to make someone else happy, to feel better about ourselves, because others have said it's the way to go or even because we believe it will make us feel safer and less fearful in this ever-expanding and overwhelming world. So maybe we suck it in, squeeze ourselves tight, give up little parts of our heart, soul, or mind to make room, or give up our neighbors to fend for

themselves...it really is a tight squeeze, after all. Sometimes it's nice inside at first, cozy; we feel relieved we fit and got in. Until it starts to feel crowded with unanswered questions, and we can't breathe being so squished into awkward versions of ourselves, and the stale air feels the opposite of life-giving. And we miss those parts of ourselves and neighbors we left outside.

This past year Jeanie has been serving as a chaplain to the Proclaim community, the professional network for publicly identified LGBTQ Lutheran rostered leaders, part of Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries. We are learning that even after the decisions of the Churchwide Assembly in 2009 opening up a way for LGBTQ people of God to serve as pastors, sometimes it's still too small of a box, too tight of a squeeze. A couple weeks ago, a seminarian in the Proclaim community who has been treated poorly by the her candidacy process wrote in response to her experience: "The problem isn't that we're not being accepted into the system, the problem is that the system is simply too small - and we get to live into a bigger reality by being shut out, intentionally or otherwise, of the expected norm." We *get* to live into a bigger reality.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself. This isn't the first time Jesus has tried to open something up, to pull people into a bigger reality. He opened up boxes by blessing the poor and meek, healing lepers, and advocating just wages for day laborers in the vineyard. And of course in just a few chapters later in Matthew's gospel, he'll bust out of a boxed-in tomb.

Jesus is thinking bigger, thinking beyond the box, beyond the tomb. Love God with all your heart, soul and mind...and love your neighbor as yourself. This messy and beautiful commandment is a call to God's bigger reality.

We are in a season of living into a bigger reality – Easter, resurrection, what seemed impossible became possible, is becoming possible. Perhaps you can relate, Jeanie. You've been on this journey a long time. No doubt many times wondering if it was possible. If God's call and promise were big enough. If our church was big enough. Our faith big enough.

Rob Bell, pastor, author, and speaker on the evangelical circuit who I respect and admire, asked in one of his early books, "What do you do when your religion isn't big enough for God?" And then Rob lived out this question a couple weeks ago. He came out publicly in favor of marriage equality. His statement is all over the internet in videos, blogs and articles. He talks about how he now believes God is calling the church into a new reality, into a bigger reality of affirmation and love for our gay brothers and sisters. And he calls other people of faith to get on board. He confesses, "some of the ways we've talked about God...don't actually shape people into more loving, compassionate people. And we have supported policies and ways of viewing the world that are actually destructive. And we've done it in the name of God and we need to repent." That's bold. Repenting on the internet. Confessing that your box for God has been too small and that your box has hurt people.

Many are praising Rob for his boldness, praising God for a Word of love and affirmation. But Rob's also taking a lot of flak for his bold and public stance. Some in his community are labeling him a liberal, saying he's not a part of their group anymore, wanting to withdraw his evangelical credentials although he continues to embrace his evangelical identity. Rob admits that this process of repenting, re-evaluating and re-envisioning can be painful, but he also says, "it's...liberating and that's where the life is." This is God's bigger reality.

But sometimes we are not famous authors whose public opinion seems to count more than most, one who chooses to step into God's bigger reality with eyes wide open. Sometimes our entrance into God's bigger reality happens when we are shut out from the expected norms not by choice. I was at the gym listening to a Ted Talk on my ipod a little while back and heard the story of Aimee Mullins. She had her legs amputated below the knee at an early age. As an adult she worked with scientists to build the best prosthetic legs possible, ones that looked the most normal, the most in-line with regular legs. But then in her own spirit and through encounters with creative children, she started to think, why am I trying so hard to fit into this small box of beauty standards, to make my legs conform to everyone else's legs, yet feeling inadequate because they could never be so? So then she started making art of her legs. She had an opportunity that most people never get – to transform her legs into anything she wanted.

Today she has over a dozen pairs of legs including glass legs, cheetah painted legs, solid wood legs with carved vines, legs made of dirt and a complex root system, and legs that people like Jeanie and I covet - legs that add 5 inches to her height. She is re-defining disability, beauty and art. And she is living into God's bigger reality of diversity and creativity as she inspires others to bust out of their own boxes and the boxes others have crafted for them.

Moving into God's bigger reality is scary, challenging and bold. We might have to repent, to change, to grow, to open up our beautiful and messy hearts, souls and minds, to the promise and call of God. A call like having faith in a world of cynicism. Honoring Sabbath in a world obsessed with productivity. Making art of our disabilities and in the process re-defining ability and beauty. Doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God in a world of corporate ladders, collateral damage and compassion fatigue.

We're here today because we believe life outside the box, outside the tomb, in God's bigger reality, is more than we can even hope for or imagine.

And this imagination has led Jeanie to answer God's call and the church's call to this particular ministry of Word and Sacrament. Jeanie, we are charging you today to help lead us, to proclaim God's word, serve Christ's meal, pray at our bedsides, baptize, and train our pastors in clinical skills to name a few expectations. And we're here to celebrate, affirm, and offer our support and prayers. We'll clap and shout, "Way to go, Jeanie! Yes, you live into God's bigger reality!" But, if we came today just to be a spectator to this thing happening to Jeanie, surprise! It's actually about all of us. Sneaky, huh? These scripture passages Jeanie chose today are about the vocation of being human, the ministry of followers of Jesus, the call of being God's children.

We're doing it together. We are making promises to Jeanie today. She isn't the only one being asked questions. Don't worry; our answers are printed in the bulletin, too: *We will, and we ask God to help us.* Because we don't have what it takes either; but we have a God who does.

This God, our God who has what it takes, is calling you, Jeanie, and inviting all of us, with our hearts, souls, minds, cheetah legs, glass legs, liberals, evangelicals, neighbors in all our beautiful and messy fullness into God's bigger reality – because that's where the life is! Will we accept God's invitation to proclaim this life with boldness and humility? Let's practice our line together: *We will and we ask God to help us.* Amen.