

# commentary

from other pens...

## A Bible lesson worthy of mention for today

It's not fashionable in the secular press to write about God, but the gospel lesson this week is worthy of mention because it defines Christianity, the religion most Americans profess.

Most churchgoers probably heard the text this week, since the bulk of our denominations work off of a common lectionary setting out a three-year cycle of Bible readings.

It's Jesus' answer to the Pharisee when, trying to trap the rabbi, he asked, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment?"

It may have been a trick question, but Jesus did not hesitate to answer:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets."

It's so simple it should be transparent. But it's not. As would-be believers, most of us, just don't get it. We have trouble loving ourselves, let alone God. We sure find it harder to love our neighbors.

We judge them. We can't take time to know them. Sometimes we hate them.

When we see sin, we rush to condemn them. We don't stop to help those in need.

When we hate abortion, someone takes it upon himself to hate the abortionist. Or the frightened young women in his office. Or to shoot the doctor.

When we see money to be made, we jump on the pile. It's only after someone catches wind of the funny accounting or the standard sales practices that we check our ethics or worry about our neighbor.

What Jesus had to say wasn't very complicated. As supposedly intelligent creatures, we should be able to grasp it. But most of us struggle not just with the idea, but with the desire to live it.

We're human, after all. We may be made (if you can believe that) in God's image, but the mold was flawed.

While we're claiming to love God, we're having a lot of trouble loving our brothers. And according to the Boss, we're supposed to do both.

There's no doubt, though, that the world would be a better place, and we would be better people, if we tried to understand what Jesus was saying.

It's a lesson that has lost little in 20 centuries of translation. — *Steve Haynes*



## A little sore, but I'm really all right

I'm fine, thank you.

Yes, a little stiff perhaps, but that could just be the damp weather.

Or, it could be that I'm 54 years old and just got tackled by a bunch of football players.

I didn't mean to become part of the game last Friday. My job is to stand on the sidelines and take pictures, and that is what I was trying to do.

The evening didn't start out well. I was tired by 6 p.m. and not very ready to go to the game.

But, the kids work hard and I really do enjoy watching them play. Besides I hadn't checked with my backup, Brad Larson, to see if he could cover the game.

I arrived a little early to get a hot dog and someone had forgotten to turn the cooker up to sizzle. The dogs were cold and it took a while to get them edible. I waited through the National Anthem as the snack shack crew tried to make things go faster by sheer will power.

Finally, dog in hand, I headed for the field.

It was Senior Night.

I was still trying to finish the wiener and it was time to take pictures. I stuffed half a hot dog in my mouth and started shooting the football boys hug-



**cynthia haynes**

• open season

ging their mothers and shaking hands with their fathers.

It had been raining or snowing for a couple of days, and the grass was soaked. Soon my shoes were soaked as I walked up and down the sidelines trying to get pictures of the plays.

I took a quick peek at the top of the camera to see how many shots I had left before I had to change film. Instead of a number between one and 20, the little box said E. E as in error. E as in there's no film in this camera. E as in I'm gonna' have words with staff on Monday morning.

The first law of cameras at the newspaper is you never leave them empty.

Heads wouldn't exactly roll on Monday morning, but several people would be getting the wrong side of my temper.

However, I had a spare roll in my pocket. As I changed film, the play moved right by me. Another great shot missed because someone didn't take an extra minute and refill the camera. Dang!

Then Brad appeared. He had stopped to change into his team colors. He'd be happy to shoot the second half so I could go home and fix supper for my husband and put on dry shoes.

We chatted and watched the game from the sidelines as I tried to get a few more shots.

Then I saw a runner. It was going to be a pass. I just knew it. I had my camera on him as he ran to the left of me down the field.

Then some instinct made me turn my back to the field and start stepping sideways. Just at that instant I was hit along with the real ball carrier.

I went down. He went down. Five or six defenders and tacklers went down.

There were guys in black to the left of me, guys in red to the right of me, green grass under my nose and Brad's feet in front of me. But, I had kept the camera from falling to the ground.

Brad grinned as he gave me a hand up. "Did you get the picture?" I asked. "No, but we made the first down," he said.

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## The Goodland Daily News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)  
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The Associated Press

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association  
National Newspaper Association  
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Published daily except Saturday and Sunday and the day observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Daily News, 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: [daily@nwkansas.com](mailto:daily@nwkansas.com). Advertising questions can be sent to: [gdnadv@nwkansas.com](mailto:gdnadv@nwkansas.com)

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$25; six months, \$42; 12 months, \$79. Out of area, weekly mailing of five issues: three months, \$30; six months, \$45; 12 months, \$80. By mail daily in Kansas, Colorado: 12 months, \$115. (All tax included.)

Incorporating: THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR  
County Herald  
Founded by Thomas McCants 1935-1989  
Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey 1994-2001

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## It's got peel appeal



**jim mullen**

• the village idiot

Our neighbor Abby has lived on her husband's farm for 30 years. She lived on her father's farm for 22 years before that. She can drive, but she doesn't like to drive on the freeway, so she came with us when we went into the city to shop for some furniture at the Humongous Colossal Furniture Barn. She likes us well enough, but she's really coming because there's a seafood restaurant she likes that we'll stop at after shopping.

Half of the Humongous Colossal Furniture Barn featured their Country Furniture collection: hordes of tables made of weathered pine covered with peeling and cracking white paint, chairs that had faded, butt-worm stencils on them, pre-sun-faded carpets with brand-new bare patches, old-timey pedestal sinks and claw-foot tubs, tin roofs and pie safes specially made to double as television cupboards.

Abby was not happy. "What do they think? Country people can't afford paint? That we don't like whirlpool tubs? That we still wait for six-month-old magazines on the noon stage? Why don't they just call it the Hillbilly Collection? That's what they mean. My house is so clean a fly could slip and break it's back and they make it look like country people live like the Clampetts. I got news for these people, I didn't take interior design

tips from the Waltons."

She is right. If it weren't for city people, the Country Furniture collection would pretty much sit right where it is. There's no pent up demand for it in the country. We got plenty of it already. Just not in our houses. My hayloft is full of out-of-date, unfashionable furniture we no longer use. Full of stuff I bought at flea markets and garage sales and then suffered, as they say at the auction houses, buyer's regret.

There's a guy in our town who makes a very good living buying tables and cupboards for \$5 and \$10 at country auctions. He paints them glossy white and sells them to weekenders from the city for hundreds of dollars. They put them in their "country" bathrooms in their suburban McMansions. It must be hard trying to make an 800-square-foot bathroom look like an outhouse, but they're sure trying. At this rate, we all wonder how long it will

be before the cities have more country furniture in them than the country.

Abby was in a better mood after a corn chowder and a platter of fried clams. "I am a farmer," she said. "But I'm not Amish. I've got an electric range. I've got a real refrigerator. I've got a Cuisinart. I've got a cell phone. You can see your face in my dining-room table, and if the President and the First Lady ever come to dinner, I might finally get a chance to use the Spode china I got as a wedding present."

"What I don't understand is why rich people think it's so much fun to be poor? Like I can eat vegetables because it's just so much darn fun. Like I make quilts because I've seen all the latest movies and have nothing better to do. I suppose if I took in laundry, they'd start doing that on the HGTV channel, too. Then, maybe not. I've been driving a 10-year-old car for 10 years and that hasn't caught on yet. Just the furniture. I'll tell you one thing, if I had money I wouldn't be buying junk furniture with peeling paint on it. I want stuff that shines."

Jim Mullen is the author of "It Takes A Village Idiot: A Memoir of Life After the City" (Simon and Schuster, 2001). He also contributes regularly to Entertainment Weekly, where he can be reached at [jim\\_mullen@ew.com](mailto:jim_mullen@ew.com)

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### berry's world

