

BETTER: PRIORITIES

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch
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TEXT: Matthew 6:33-34, Matthew 22:35-40

In the 1930's and 1940's, radio shows were high entertainment for the average American. I've been told how families used to gather around a large radio and listen intently to such shows as "Fibber McGee and Molly" and "The Jack Benny Show" ... or even "Superman" and "Gunsmoke". In 1938, on the "Kate Smith Show", there was one special act that has become quite famous, when Bud Abbot and Lou Costello were special guests on the show. I'm sure many of you will remember hearing about it. It was their skit about "Who's on First?"

It seems that Costello receives a telegram at the start of the show – from Yankee baseball player, Joe DeMaggio. Joe was recovering from a foot operation and wanted Costello to take his place on the team while he recovered. Costello was thrilled. It was the news he had been waiting for. But Abbot was doubtful – he didn't think Costello knew anything about baseball. They go through a series of jokes and skits about baseball – and then Abbot receives some news. The Yankee manager wants Abbot as coach as long as Costello is on the team! Great! Now Abbot can tell Costello all the names of the players, so that Costello can get to know them.

Abbot says, "Sure – I'll tell you the names but strange as it may seem, they are giving baseball players some pretty peculiar name these days – names like Dizzy Dean and Daffy Duck. On the Yankees, "Who's" on 1st, "What's" on 2nd, and "I don't know" is on third."

Costello is confused and the conversation continues something like this:

"But who's on first?" "Who" "That's what I'm asking you ---
Who's playing first?" "That's right"
"Look when they pay the person the 1st base, who gets the money?"
"That's right – every dollar of it! – Sometimes his wife comes down and gets it."
"Who's wife?" "Yes!"
"All I'm asking you is who's the guy on 1st base?"
"That's right"

The conversation gets even crazier as they go through all nine players. It is a routine that has become famous – and everyone remembers that phrase: "Who's on First?"

And that question comes to us this day – as we begin a new year – And our new sermon series called "Better". It's the perfect time to look ahead and ask ourselves if we are living the kind of life that God wants for us, or if we could do better. Throughout our series, we will evaluate our priorities, our relationships, our mindset and our witness – and ask if there are some changes we need to make to life more faithfully as disciples of Christ – to be "better" in our Christian walk.

Today, we ask the question “Who’s on First” – a question of priorities, that seems to be actually all throughout Scripture, as people have struggled to live a life of faith in relation to God. And it is a question that really is often easier “answered” than lived out.

The Bible is very clear in saying who should be first in our lives. Reading in Matthew 22, we hear this is what Jesus calls the greatest commandment: We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul and mind. We are to love God with EVERYTHING. He should be first in every part of our lives. How we “do” our life should reflect how we love God. This means how we care for our spouses and parent our children should be reflective of our relationship with God. Our actions in the workplace and in relationships with others should say something about our relationship with Jesus. He is the center of everything we do – and say – and the decisions we make. What things we do with our time and talents and how we spend our money – all should reflect that we have loved God with all our hearts and souls and minds!

Jesus says that the first and greatest commandment is to love God – the second is just like it – we are to love our neighbor. It seems like that’s the order of our priorities that Jesus wants us to get right. Put God first and then the love of our neighbors will follow. As Jesus says in Matthew 22:40 – all the law and the prophets depend on getting these two commandments right. We are not to get them out of order – in our lives, putting ourselves as the top priority – or our jobs, or money – our desire for things or putting our love of entertainment and even sports up as the top priority.

Jesus said in the sermon on the mount, in Matthew 6: *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness – and all these things will be given to you as well.”* What that means is that we have to get our priorities right – and everything else will fall into place. As the Life Application Bible interprets it: *“seeking first the kingdom of God means to put God first in your life; to fill your thoughts with His desires; to take His character for your pattern, and to serve and obey Him in every area of your life.”* Once we do that – then we will find that God takes care of everything else.

When I was growing up in Texas, our family’s favorite football team was Dallas Cowboys and we all especially like Coach Tom Landry. He was their coach for an amazing 29 years! Someone once asked Tom Landry why he had been so successful as a football coach. He said, “In 1958, I did something everyone who has been successful must do. I determined my priorities for my life – God, family and then football.”

I think Tom Landry had it right. In order to succeed in our families and our jobs – in really every area of our life, we have to pursue God first and foremost. When we seek God, we look to do things in our lives that shape us into someone who looks more and more like Jesus Christ – loving, courageous and sacrificial.

Years ago, in a fun-loving radio skit, Abbot got confused with the question of “Who’s on First?” As we begin a new year – and look towards being a better you – how will you respond to that question, “Who’s on First?” Who’s on first in your life?