

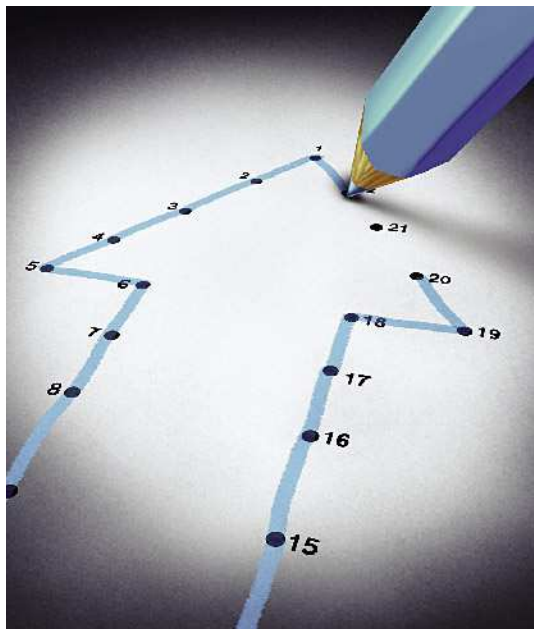


Looking at which Scripture passages Jesus emphasizes (remember, the Hebrew Bible is his only Bible!) shows he clearly understands how to connect the “three steps forward” dots that confirm the God he has met, knows, loves, and trusts. At the same time, Jesus ignores or openly contradicts the many “two steps backward” texts. He never quotes the book of Numbers, for example, which is



by Richard Rohr

...Jesus doesn't quote from his own Scriptures when they are punitive, imperialistic, classist, or exclusionary. In fact, he teaches the exact opposite in every case.



Luke 4:18-19): "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, and to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord."

But Jesus plays fast and easy, as they say, and quotes selectively! He appears to have deliberately omitted the last line—"and the day of vengeance of our God" (Isaiah 61:2b)—because he does not believe in a God of vengeance at all.

We can only safely read Scripture—it is a dangerous book—if we are somehow sharing in the divine gaze of love. A life of prayer helps you develop a third eye that can read between the lines and find the golden thread which is moving toward inclusivity, mercy, and justice. I am sure that is what Paul means when he teaches that we must "know spiritual things in a spiritual way" (1 Corinthians 2:13).

Any "pre-existing condition" of a hardened heart, a predisposition to judgment, a fear of God, any need to win or prove yourself right will

Jesus knows how to connect the dots and find out where the text is truly heading... He knows there is a bigger arc to the story, one that always reveals a God who is compassionate, non-violent, and inclusive of outsiders.

rather ritualistic and legalistic. He never quotes Joshua or Judges, which are full of sanctified violence. Basically, Jesus doesn't quote from his own Scriptures when they are punitive, imperialistic ("My country and religion are the 'only!'"), classist, or exclusionary.

In fact, he teaches the exact opposite in every case. This is hard to miss. And our job as Christians is to imitate Jesus!

Jesus does not mention the list of 28 "thou shall nots" in Leviticus 18 through 20, but chooses instead to echo the rare positive quote of Leviticus 19:18: "You must love your neighbor as yourself." The longest single passage he quotes is from Isaiah 61 (in

Jesus knows how to connect the dots and find out where the text is truly heading, beyond the low-level consciousness of a particular moment, fear, or circumstance. He knows there is a bigger arc to the story, one that always reveals a God who is compassionate, non-violent, and inclusive of outsiders. (Such passages are already found in the Hebrew Bible!) He knew how to "thin slice" the text, to find the overall pattern based on small windows of insight.

He learned from Ezekiel, for example, that God's justice is restorative and not retributive.

God *punishes* Israel by loving the Israelites even more! How did we miss that one?

corrupt and distort the most inspired and inspiring of Scriptures—just as they pollute every human conversation and relationship. Hateful people will find hateful verses to confirm their love of death. Loving people will find loving verses to call them into an even greater love of life. And both kinds of verses are in the Bible! □

Adapted from *Hierarchy of Truths: Jesus' Use of Scripture* by Richard Rohr. © Copyright 2014 by Center for Action and Contemplation: Albuquerque, New Mexico (cac.org). Used by permission.

*Fr. Richard Rohr is an ecumenical teacher and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He is the author of many books, including Immortal Diamond: the Search for Our True Self.*