
Lessons from Learning to Ride a Bike

By the Rev. Canon Lauren Holder, Canon for Community and Education

Last summer, we purchased a “real” bike for our son. Anyone who tried to buy a bike last summer during the get-all-the-outdoor-distractions-possible frenzy of COVID-19 knows just how hard this purchase was. But we did secure a bike at last, and our son did learn how to ride it in a very, very empty Cathedral parking lot.

Of course, that bike no longer fits our growing child. So, this summer we once again found ourselves purchasing a new bike, and our daughter is now learning to ride the bike our son learned to ride last year.

Watching these two learn has reminded me of several life lessons:

- The two hardest things to learn are starting and stopping
- Look where you want to go
- Wear a helmet
- Always end on a good try

Why is it so hard to start? And if starting is so hard, why is it also so hard to stop? It’s those darn transitions. Change is hard! Once we get going, we get in a groove—but then we can’t just keep going forever, so we change gears or hit the brakes or pray that someone will help us stop until we can figure out how to do it on our own. I find this to be true of other things in life—spiritual practices, exercise routines, writing, relationships. Starting and stopping can be hard and often take practice.

When my daughter practiced riding this weekend, she looked this way and that way, and her handlebars followed the direction of her head. I started saying “look straight ahead!” but then realized looking straight ahead isn’t always helpful. If you’re looking straight at a curb, you’re bound to hit said curb. So I started saying “look where you want to go!” and that seemed to ring truer for both biking and life. Where do you want to go? If your answer is simply “anywhere but here…” you won’t go far. Take some time to name where you want to go with God. If life is anything like biking, God will not simply pick you and your bike up and plop you down in the exact place you want to land. But God will hold onto your seat, running beside you and cheering you on, reminding you to look where you want to go as you grow more comfortable pedaling, balancing, and steering.

Wearing a helmet is of course a must for protecting your precious awe-inspiring brain. But when learning to ride a bike, sometimes pants and long sleeves are a must too. You will fall. It’s like in our baptismal covenant, “whenever you fall into sin…” or in the prayers for the sacrament of marriage, “give them grace, when they hurt each other…” To ride is to fall. To live is to fall. At times we bounce back up, and at times we hurt ourselves badly. Don’t live or ride as if you won’t fall—it never ends well. Instead protect that which God has created in you with the same love and care with which God created you. Cover yourself with prayer, ask for reinforcements when you need them, wear your helmet.

And finally, as the old adage goes, when you fall down, get up and try again. I did a bad job of “catching” my son the other day when he tried to stop. He was coming in fast and I stopped him too abruptly instead of running beside him to slow him to a stop. We tumbled to the ground and landed in a heap. We were okay, but my son was shaken. I couldn’t let that be his last try of the day, so I said, “We’re going to do that one more time so we can remember how much fun we’ve had today. I promise I’ll do a better job of catching you this time.” So, we did. And thank goodness. Because redemption is everywhere! And sometimes we need the muscle-memory of a good try to see it.

May your summer be filled with learning new skills—or perhaps re-learning old ones. May you care for yourself as you learn. And may you discover the freedom that comes from recognizing the voice of God running

alongside you, cheering you on: “Keep looking where you want to go! You can do it! I’ve got you.”

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