

Lent 1 March 1-7

When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the ear

Genesis 9:8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

Reflection

Lent begins with a covenant - with an everlasting Covenant, a covenant, not between God and Noah, not between God and Christians, not even between God and humans but between God and all flesh.

The season we use as a time of self denial, a season of repentance and penitence is a season bursting with abundance, bursting with God's everlasting love and promise. Lent is a time for us to discern what is truly important in our piety, in our devotion and faith. It is a time for us to turn away from those things which limit us, those things which tempt us to poverty of faith, which entice us to smallness of vision, allure us to a faith of ease, . We are called to leave a faith, which we can express by rote, and live thoughtlessly, and called to a faith which embraces the everlasting covenant between God and all flesh

This is a season for us to determine what we would give for this everlasting Covenant. Will we fully give our devotion, our substance, ourselves, without counting the cost, or will we give just the smallest portion of those things we think we need to give, in order to satisfy the requirements of our faith.?

Lent 2 March 8- 14.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Reflection

The season of Lent is a season of miracles. A 99 year old, childless couple are promised a new beginning, a numerous family. They will be the ancestors of a multitude of nations. Years ago I visited a woman who was wondering what she should do. There was a three year long , Theology by Distance Program, being offered in the area. She said to me "I'm too old - in three years I will be 77 years old. Then her face brightened and she said. Whether I do the course or don't do the course, in three years I will be 77 years old. She did the course and at 77 years of age she graduated, with a heart and an enthusiasm and an energy that was an inspiration for those a third her age.

Lent is a time for us to realize that no part of our life; our youth, our old age, our living or our dying, that is outside of God's grace, or beyond God using. Regardless of our age, regardless of the stage of our life, our very best, with God, is still ahead of us, that is what the eternal Covenant means!

Lent 3 March 15-21

God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery...

Exodus 20: 1-17

God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work _ you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

In his reflections for this Sunday Herbert O'Driscolle points out that a little while ago almost every Christian would have known this passage by heart, however, at present these commandments are largely unfamiliar to a new generation.

Learning by heart is no longer a widespread educational strategy and set rules an unpopular moral methodology. Rules became unpopular as many seemed arbitrary and intended as mechanism for the "ruling" classes and peoples to control "lower" classes . The Bible became used as an instrument to keep women subservient to husbands, lower classes were reminded not to reach above their station. Because of such a history modern people are suspicious of rules and want to know who is making the rule and why.

The opening verse of this passage gives the who and the why. These are commandments of God who here reminds his people that it was God who formed and created them as a people, who brought them from bondage. Throughout both the Hebrew and Christian scripture we are reminded of this relationship, the relationship we have with the God who formed and created us, who brought us from bondage and who continues to do so. To honour and obey these commandments is to first honour our God as reflected in the first four commandments and then to honour one another as is reflected in the final six.

These commandments are not arbitrary rules to enforce control they are a blueprint of godly relationship, with one another and with our God. It is important that we know them, hold them in our heart and obey them, not because they are rules that God sets for us as a test of obedience but because they offer us a better way of living with our God, with one another and with ourselves.

Lent 4, March 22-28

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way.

Numbers 21.4-9

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Reflection

One of the great pleasures of being a bishop is that I get to travel around and meet people from all the communities and congregations of our Diocese and from time to time travel elsewhere in Canada, and, of course, just last year to Lambeth. Everywhere I go I hear stories. Often they are stories of conflict and the "characters" involved in those conflicts. In the tempestuous times, in which we live in the Canadian church, we imagine that in Africa, in the Southern Cone, somewhere, all are of one mind and one accord. That, of course is wishful thinking. Even when God led the way, even while in the midst of an event so powerful as the Exodus, that would inspire and motivate their people for 3000 years, the people, actually there, squabbled, complained.

The exciting truth is that every generation of faithful Christians must travel the wilderness journey and make the faith our own. It does not help to romanticize our past. We have always stumbled, always strayed, always failed, but there has always been redemption. For the people of the Exodus it was the bronze serpent on a stick, for Christians we look to Jesus on a cross.

We are not far from that event in our liturgical year and we begin to look ahead to that cross. As we are bitten in the coming week by our failure and stumbling, as we gripe and complain about the failures of our church, which, we may feel, has led us into this wilderness, let us look to the cross and ask what is it calling out of us? Is it calling more complaints, greater griping or a greater faith that it is in this wilderness where we are led by God.

Lent 5, March 29 - April 4

I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts;

Jeremiah 31.31-34

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt _ a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

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Reflection

Once again, this Lent, we are reminded that God and our ancestors made a covenant and then God took them by the hand, as one would a child, and brought them out of the land of Egypt. Here though, we get just a hint of how God viewed that covenant. God brought them, not as a general at the head of an army, not as an owner driving his slaves, not as a Lord ruling his subjects, but as a husband, leading his beloved! But this covenant is broken and a new covenant needed. However, this new covenant will not be an external covenant, but a covenant of the heart, and all will "Know the Lord"

We take much pride in our wonderful buildings, how well they can be maintained, how clean and tidy. We take pride in our history and our tradition and in many of those externals of faith and yet here the new covenant seems more focused on our personally experienced spirituality than on the externals of religion.

We need to be careful here because this is not a "personal relationship" with God. It is a personal experience of the covenant relationship, a personal experience of the relationship between God and his People, not God and his person. Our relationship with God is always in the context of the Covenant and Covenant is lived and experienced as community We rejoice in that community and in the Covenant between God and his people and in our personal experience of that Covenant relationship.

Palm Sunday - April 5

It is the Lord God who helps me

Isaiah 50.4-9a

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens _ wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me.; who will declare me guilty?

Reflection

These words of Isaiah, read this, the week of the crucifixion, remind us of Jesus. While they were written hundreds of years before Jesus, they certainly must reflect some of the thoughts of Jesus this week.

So often we touch base with thoughts of Jesus, reminding ourselves of his words and teaching, and finding correction, encouragement, challenge in those words. Truth is, some of these words we receive deeply within ourselves, others we skip over or interpret into banality and like the disciples we can be his firmest friend and gravest adversary within the same moment.

What we often forget is the great cost that being the teacher and preacher and healer and friend to friendless was for Jesus. That cost was not only shown by the cross but through out his ministry and life. Jesus began his life as a refugee. He was assaulted and insulted. Lies were told and misinformation given even to the authorities concerning him.

The role of a Christian is not always an easy one. While we need to be careful not to covet the pleasing glow of martyrdom we are called to live by different standards. We are called not to live for ourselves but as servants. We are not called to judge others but to love enemies. We are called to be the neighbour of Samaritans. This seems pretty safe and bland living and yet it was this kind of living that brought Jesus to the cross.

In this Holy Week let us reflect on the challenge and cost of holy living, and renew ourselves in its challenge, "for it is the Lord God who helps me..".