

March 22, 2015 - Fifth in Lent

Jeremiah 31: 31- 34

Remember the famous 1950's and 60's Miss Clairol commercials. The first one asked the provocative question "Does she or doesn't she? Only her hairdresser knows for sure." Next came the intriguing one, "Is it true blonds have more fun?" Then we all remember the iconic ad where a beautiful blond in a yellow dress bounces across a field or a beach into the waiting arms of a man who lifts her up gazing adoringly into her eyes. All the while a voice over says: "The closer he gets the better you look. New! Nice'n Easy by Clairol."

The shift from the hair salon to the home changed hair colouring forever. It is claimed that within six years, 70% of women in North America were colouring their hair. Apparently getting closer and getting closer to home sure made a difference.

Our Lenten readings from the Old Testament follow the journey of God's four Covenants moving closer and closer to home, closer and closer to our humanity, our hearts.

The journey begins with Noah and the rainbow and God's covenant with all creation. Never again will God destroy all life. God has retired from such things. God has hung up God's hunting bow in the sky as a reminder. From now on God is always for life and the living.

The journey takes us to Abraham and Sarah and God's covenant to give them descendants, as many as the stars in the night sky. God has chosen a people, for a special relationship, to bless all the nations, all the families of the earth.

The journey moves on, to Moses and the Ten Commandments.

God promises to journey with God's people. The new covenant focuses on how to journey with God, how to love God, and how to love all whom God loves.

In other words how to love God and love our neighbour as we travel together.

The journey finally comes to Jeremiah and the vision of the fourth covenant, which is to be written on our hearts. It will not be outside us as rules and regulations, but come forth from within us as the Wisdom of compassion.

Thus our sins or errors will not be remembered anymore.

Notice the progression: Creation, nation, neighbour, heart.

As Christians, as followers of Jesus, we believe that Jesus initiates the fulfillment of the fourth and final covenant. Jesus embodies God's Wisdom and compassion in his life. He reveals God's Wisdom in his

teaching and God's compassion in his healing. And with both in his own heart, he risks being handed over to the authorities as he brings this new covenant reality to Jerusalem.

Notice, this progression is no longer the work of a distant judgmental God. Rather, our experiences of grace today come from the unexpected discovery of being already and always forgiven, the unexpected freedom to move forward in life, to love again, to get it right the next time.

God doesn't want us mired in the mud and muck of guilt all our lives. God wants us to be all that we can become. So this covenantal progression moves away from the sins of commission and moves toward reducing the sins and errors of omission.

Let me unpack this theological jargon. The sins of commission are the things we do that make a mess of life and hurt others: The unavoidable entanglements of an inter-connected Creation. I'm talking about all the actions we take that wilfully or unwittingly hurt others.

The sins of omission are all the opportunities to help and share and restore relationships that we miss out on, because we are too busy. All the situations that we fail to bring our blessing to because we are too distracted. Simply put, sins of commission concern what we do to our neighbour, and sins of omission are what we fail to do for our neighbour.

So, the covenantal progression to having the terms written on our hearts is a lot like healthy family life; where parents simply want what's best for their child.

We don't keep a record of all our child's mistakes!

We don't start off each day by reminding our child of his or her previous failures or shortcomings.

We don't! Do we?? Well, God doesn't either!

When raising a family it is not the sins of commission that matter. 99% of the time the errors and failings of the previous day are over and done with. We just let them go. If we kept remembering all the stuff our kids inflict upon us daily we would strangle them. So we let it all go. It is simply the cost of family life, of parenting in an imperfect world.

However, it is the sin or error of omission that we seek to minimize in raising our children. As our children grow and mature, it is the opportunity to learn life's lessons that we seek to address.

"Remember to say thank you."

"Remember to be polite."

"Remember to wash your hands."

"Remember to put gas in the car when you return."

Taking time for training, trumps taking a time out, any day.

Likewise it is the sin or error of omission that God seeks to minimize by writing the New Covenant on our hearts!

So God's Covenants with us move closer and closer so that we can learn life's lessons by heart. It is an internalizing that lets go of past errors and brings forth new blessings in each situation.

The Application for Today

Since the sins and errors of yesterday are no longer remembered, God offers us a covenant of Wisdom and compassion from the heart, to bless one another. Amen.

John 12: 24, 27-36

We are all mindful of the extremist versions of Divine Judgment terrorizing the world these days. ISIS is bombing any symbols of Christianity in Syria right now. Some years ago the Taliban blew up the giant Buddha's in Afghanistan. Beheading infidels has been revived from the dust bins of history. It wasn't that long ago that we Christians thought we possessed the one and only way to salvation. Such exclusive or extremist beliefs betray a heartless outlook and judgement upon outsiders. But our gospel lesson shows us a different kind of judgement. In fact I would suggest it transcends our concepts of judgement altogether. Let's take a closer look at just how this judgement business becomes something else with Jesus.

Jesus has just entered Jerusalem with a crowd of followers. John tells us that people are seeking audiences with Jesus and the Pharisees complain that, "the whole world has gone over to him." Political pressures are building. You can almost reach out and touch the tension in the air. Passover is near and messianic expectations are rising. Many believe The Day of Judgement; the Day of The Lord is at hand. Many more seek a military messiah, and harsh judgement handed out to the hated Romans.

Jesus reflects on the processes of the natural order. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain." Is it about self-protection or self-surrender? He wonders.

It is a moment of truth for Jesus! Does he stay in this hot house of judgement or does he run for cover?

Jesus says, "Now is my heart troubled. And what should I say,

'Father save me from this hour?' No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour."

He will stay the course. He will surrender to God's New Covenant written on his heart. He will continue to reveal God's Wisdom in his teaching and God's compassion in his healing. He will continue without any self-justifying judgements, even though he is defenceless in the face of a menacing empire. He will creatively engage the authorities to maximize the chances of the religious leaders embracing God's New Covenant written on our heart.

Precisely because of this defencelessness and precisely because of his creative engagement through self-surrender, he can see things as they are unfolding:

"Now is the judgement of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

So, driving out here is not to be by military might but by public exposure.

It is not by condemnation but by revelation.

The driving out is not to be by coercion but by persuasion.

It is not by self-righteous indignation but by self-surrender.

Jesus lets go of judgement with all its coercive power and continues to embrace Divine Wisdom.

This Wisdom in the public square is a decision for compassion to shape the outcome. It is the Wisdom, driving compassion that seeks to reveal the truth without physical force. It is the Wisdom, driving compassion that seeks to reveal the cruelty without acrimony. It is the Wisdom, driving compassion that seeks to reveal the injustice without insult.

On a personal level, Jesus' Wisdom works through our hearts. We all know what I'm talking about. It is the Wisdom that lets go of what's supposed to be right in favour of what actually helps.

Jesus' letting go of judgement for Wisdom reveals to us, without exposing us.

Jesus' letting go of judgement for Wisdom respects us so that we might act respectfully!!

We celebrate Jesus' Wisdom driving our compassion when we forgive before being asked to forgive.

We celebrate Jesus' Wisdom driving our compassion when we 'pay it forward' without expecting to be paid back.

The Application for Today

Jesus shows us how to let go of judgement for Wisdom and become Children of Light. Amen.