

Third Sunday in Lent

11th March 2012

Exodus 20:1-17, Psalm 19, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, John 2: 13-22

In the name of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen

Have you noticed the Bible is easier to read in Lent? The readings are easier to understand, and maybe even speak to us a little more deeply than during other times of the year. Perhaps this is because we consciously read them during Lent in the context of a journey; and not just any journey, but on the path from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. Here, we find ourselves looking to the scriptures as we seek our movement toward resurrection.

Lent itself offers us the opportunity to look at the Lenten journey in the light of the scriptures; and that in turn is an opportunity, an experiential time, for us to look at our life (and every life) and to see life itself illuminated by the scriptures. If Lent is the journey toward resurrection then can we, in these 40 days, experientially glimpse that life is the same journey. Isn't this exactly what the exodus seeks to reveal, and the same that Christ experienced in his life and so too seeks to reveal for every life?

The world gives us a life paradigm that we see, touch, taste, smell and hear; a life that begins at birth and that ends in death, and decay is the arrow of life's direction. Lent is quite different; it starts with decay in extremis, in the ashes of Ash Wednesday; and its arrow of direction is toward the fullness of life found in resurrection, a life lived in the realisation of Divine Glory.
This is why Lent, and the experience of Lent, can be so important for us; Lent offers us a different direction to life itself.
It is a life movement:

- That goes beyond what we see, and opens our eyes to the unseen.
- That goes beyond what we taste to that which we hunger and thirst for.
- That goes beyond what we smell to the perfume of Love and the incense of prayer.
- That goes beyond what we hear to the Word of silence
- And beyond what we touch to that which we can only believe.

Within the scriptures we can find reflections of this Lenten journey and so too see ourselves and our lives brought into a newness of being that comes when we can see ourselves reaching out beyond our place of birth and death. It is a movement that once embraced, moves us from a life bounded by death in which we take from it whatever we can, to a life of unbounded life in which we give all that we are. And again the scriptures, and our Lenten readings provide us with an evolving enlightenment that seeks to open for us and give us some reference points or confidence in the way of this new life orientation.

We can see in this week's reading and the last two weeks Old testament readings an evolution in the understanding of "covenant", and so a movement in our appreciation of the relationship between Humanity and Divinity. On the first Sunday of Lent, the covenant with Noah was for all humanity, and then in the second Sunday, we encounter the covenant with Abraham and Sarah which becomes more specific and talks of a multitude of nations. This week we hear of the covenant through Moses that is for Israel, one particular people. The first two covenants are of God, and are given as the activity of God; this week Moses receives the covenant of the commandments that require active participation of those receiving the gift.

We see in this progression a growing understanding and a growing intimacy in the relationship - the divide between humanity and divinity becomes ever closer. And we can experience the same progression within ourselves as we turn toward the orientation of Lent and accept resurrection rather than decay as our life's arrow of direction.

The child of faith sees only the power of God, the child experiences only dependence on the parents who grant life and give life. But in growing up that parent-child covenantal relationship changes and more and more the child is empowered and becomes more participative in life's unfolding, until that same child emerges as a potential parent and so too a creator of life.

During Lent and life, we move through the covenants of Noah, Abraham & Sarah and Moses and we grow into the intimacy that is revealed in the new covenant revealed in Christ - a oneness with the father, that place where we find at one, the fullness of humanity and the fullness of Divinity.

In the second reading today we have this understanding more fully opened up for us in Paul's writings. *21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified* We must be careful in reading this so that we do not throw 'wisdom' out with the bathwater. It is right and good that Paul says; *the world did not know God through wisdom,* so long as we appreciate that worldly wisdom still has a place. Wisdom leads to the discovery of all that is around us; it enables us to understand and relate at a sensate level with the environment and with each other. However, the foolishness of the cross takes us beyond the sensate to the world within and beyond, to that new paradigm that we are invited to encounter in Lent. Paul underlines the orientation of Lent and at the same time brings the evolution of covenant full circle for what started out as a covenant with Noah for all humanity is now a new covenant with all of humanity - *both Jews and Greeks.*

When we read again the story of Moses and the Ten Commandments in light of this passage from Paul, we can see that the value of the narrative is in the evolving Covenantal relationship, and not in the actuality of the events contained in the story. It is not about the tablets of Stone being handed to Moses on top of the mountain - that is only an understanding for those who *demand signs*. And, contrary to much of Church history, it is not about the content of the commandments - that is the focus for those who *desire wisdom*. And the Jews and Greeks who demand signs and wisdom can be seen to represent those two perspectives that we have in our everyday experience of life, we want to see and understand

the path we tread. Again, Lent invites us into a new order of Life, and a new orientation that takes us beyond the security of what we see and understand into the foolishness of belief and into a life that is more fully revealed to us in Christ.

In John's gospel the 'cleansing of the temple' is placed right at the start of Jesus' ministry – the other three gospels place it as the event the initiates his journey to death. John is seeking to underline again the fullness of that covenantal progression we have already looked at. The temple was/is a foundational icon of the orthodox faith – a sign – and also the venerated dwelling place of God. Even today those whose faith has not evolved from their childhood often refer to the Church as God's house.

John uses this narrative, not to recall an event, rather to illustrate that in Christ the covenant has reached a fullness. *18 The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* In response to their seeking for signs, Jesus reveals that all that the temple represents is now made flesh, and embodied in humanity. Temples and churches are still signs; however, they point beyond themselves and they point to a living dwelling place, revealed in the resurrection, they point toward an embodiment of God and to the fullness of humanity at one with divinity.

Here we can find refreshment and a remembering as we seek a movement beyond a life lived outside of the enlightenment of Lent, and here we can find both promise and companions as we engage the foolishness that Easter holds for all of humanity.

The Lord be with you
Peter Humphris