

Sunday, March 21, 2021
Fifth Sunday in Lent

We are living in a new covenant which is not like the old. In the covenant the Lord offered through Moses, which was not kept, there was a proposition. We know that the law cannot save us. That is, we are unable to live the spirit of the law as we are. That does not mean that the law is bad, far from it, but it does mean that merely being obedient is not what the Lord is after. The law will never make us children of God.

What the law does tell us, reflect for us, is the heart of God. The Father has placed order into the universe. We see it all around us and our hearts rejoice with a beautiful sunrise or sunset. The sun is shining every day, whether we see it or not. We love it when others obey what is right and fitting in every situation, although, at times, we do not see it in ourselves when we are not obeying the law.

The law *is* written on our hearts, but there is often a more basic and diabolical thing going on. Born into this age of rebellion, we think that we know what is best. We, I, do this often. Jesus has come because we need saving. Not only that, but in order that we may become what we can become through one means only – by grace and being transformed by that grace. This is sometimes difficult to grasp, but it is essential that we begin.

How often do we cry out to the Lord saying, “Save me from this hour?” Life is sometimes difficult and we do not like the circumstances. But circumstances change. What then? Do you go off forgetting the difficulties? Sadly, we often do. But I ask the question, “What have you learned from your circumstances?” I would further ask, as I address the fellowship, “What have we learned through our circumstances?” Seeking the answer to this is a matter of faith.

We know that the Lord will work everything together for good for those who love Him. But do we have faith to believe that this is true? Don’t worry about it if you do not. The Lord died for all of our sins. This may seem like a trivial point, but it is an important one. Too readily, we slip into a works-righteousness mode where we think we must do something. Just believe. Where your belief is lacking, trust the Lord who is leading you. Where your trust is lacking, just know that the Lord, who knows all things, has already accomplished your salvation. The part that is important is that we all walk with Him wherever He will lead.

Jesus told us that the Son will make us free. If we are in a legalistic mode, we apply a sinful understanding on top of this and think we may do as we please. But this is the very thing from which we need to be saved. Doing as I please is what has gotten me into trouble. It cannot be that. But the glimmer that provides hope for me is the reality that all things really are in the Lord’s hands. What does this mean? It means that I no longer need to fret, worry, be concerned with what the outcome is going to be. Of course, I will do these things, but I know that it will be in accordance with the Lord’s will. This is what He has promised. What then? Take that energy and use it moving forward upon the path which the Lord has placed before you.

Jesus has given us a heads up. The ruler of this world is without power. Sure, he is thrashing about, but there is no power. Jesus is drawing all people unto Himself. Now, from our perspective we may think that one is going this way and another that, but remember the words of Jesus from the cross where He thanked the Father that not one was lost. Who will be in heaven? We’ll find out. That I desire to look Jesus in the eye and be known even as I am fully known, that is the prize. The struggle in the flesh is to live in the freedom which Christ gives us. Perhaps this is the reason we need the season of Lent, and to a lesser degree, Advent. We need reminders.

Our Lord is so gracious that He gives us what we need. Jesus needed no affirmation. This is hard to fathom. He who knew no sin does not react the way we sinners react. He is not jealous as we are jealous. He does not covet as we covet. He kind and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

I'm not sure how you look at Jesus, but there are two significant ways in which Scripture gives us a picture of Jesus. The first is Jesus as the Savior. God so loves the world that He gives His Son for our redemption. Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. He is the One through whom all things have their being. He is the One who must lead us. The second is Jesus as the example. We need to see what it means to be obedient, even unto death. We need to see how to be humble and seek the Father's will in all things. We need to learn how to pray. We need to learn how to be a servant of the Most High. Jesus shows us all of these things as well.

“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered.” Listen to this hope carefully. You have been given the gift of becoming a child of God through the grace of Jesus. When you hear the beatitudes, you hear the reality of suffering in this world. I may not know why the small child dies, or why a calamity falls upon people here or there, but I do know the promise of God that He is working all things together for good for those who love Him. By the example of Jesus, I begin to understand that a part of the perfecting process is through the suffering that is endured in this age.

We then hear, “Having been made perfect . . .” Our English language has done us a great disservice in translating the word into *perfect*. In Greek, there are two words, and the first is the one we often think of. It is a word that we understand as epitome. To be perfect is to be the best. That is not what Scripture teaches us. Yes, Christ Jesus is the best, but this is not what He demonstrates for us. The second word in Greek is more important, for it talks about being made complete. When Jesus began His ministry, He was (and still is) perfect, but the salvation from the cross had not yet been accomplished. He was made perfect – that is, completed for us – through the cross. When we begin to understand this, we begin to see that all of the things that happen to us in this life are about perfecting us. What that means takes us right back to the promise that everything – absolutely everything – is working together according to the riches of God's grace. He will accomplish what He has set out to do.

Jesus is the Great High Priest. The first thing we need to understand is that the *Kohen* simply means the ability to draw near to God. We understand that sin has gotten in the way and we cannot draw near to God. Christ, through His grace, makes us clean so that now we too can be priests; that is, draw near to God. This and this alone is what the priesthood of all believers means. We all have the law written on our hearts and through Christ, we all have access to the heavenly throne. It does not mean, nor will it ever, that we can do what belongs to the One who has the call to save us. Jesus was called to be our intermediary. He alone grants access through the mysteries of the faith. He is the perfect High Priest.

To be glorified in Christ is to be wrapped up in the truth. We are to bear whatever cross this age will give us in the hope that all things truly are in the Lord's hands. The work of the Father is evident in what Christ has and is doing in our lives. What will come, will come, but never lose sight of the prize which is the salvation which is yours through the promise of Christ. All have been invited and as many as come to Him in the amazing grace He gives are called into the freedom of not having to figure all of these things out, but living the abundant life that is being prepared to dwell with Christ forever. May you richly dwell in the grace and mercy which is yours in Christ, now and unto eternity. Amen.

