

Quinquagesima 2017

The Cry for Salvation

1 John 2:1-17

St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, OR

by Rev. Mr. Bill Baker

Today is the Quinquagesima, the last of the three pre-Lent Sundays and 50 days before the great observance of Christ's resurrection celebrated on Easter Sunday. The teaching of the day is a journey of love that unites two very unlikely partners...humanity to that of the divine. The Pre-Lent Sundays focus our thoughts and inclinations on the ultimate love of the Father towards mankind, the reciprocation of that love and the imparting of that same love to our fellow and future brothers and sisters in Christ. Lent is a time set aside to seriously consider our spiritual journeys by introspection, self examination and an honest assessment of where our current values lie...the journey of Lent is a cry for Salvation. It is on this journey that we seek to be closer to God than to the world. Jesus Christ leads the journey we are about to enter as he makes his way to the Cross, to give up his life in ransom for our security. As we traverse these coming weeks of Lent, it is my hope that our fellowship with Christ and with one another will touch our souls at a level that heightens and strengthens our desires to repent, furthering our ability to walk more fully in the light of Jesus Christ. And what better way to lead into the Lenten season than with the divine words given to St. John in our New Testament lesson today;

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2)

We hear these comfortable words of scripture every Communion Sunday and for good reason...these words give us hope...these words, when meditated upon, bring peace and these words, when understood, tell us how much God loves each and everyone of us. And John, continuing, writes; *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments."* This is not just about rules and regulations, this is about being followers of Christ and seeking to do what he calls us to

do... and doing so because of love. The Law was given to the Israelites in the form of stone tablets containing the inscription of 10 Commandments necessary to walk in righteousness...How many of those then or us now, were or are able to walk boldly within the boundaries of these commandments? Obviously the answer is zero, none, nada. So, what do we make of this statement; *“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.”* Well, let’s continue.

“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. (not so comforting thus far) He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. (Yikes!) Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment, which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word, which ye have heard from the beginning.” (True, and one that we have failed from the beginning.) If left under the Commandments alone, we would have no hope in satisfying God’s requirements for righteousness and the glory of Heavens eternity would elude us. It would seem that the only way to find peace would be to fool ourselves that we are living righteous lives according to the Ten Commandments...that doing our best...is good enough. We would be a people lost in darkness. But, John’s inspired Word does not end leaving us in despair. With God there is hope and that hope has come in a new commandment and a new light; here is that hope John gives us:

“Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.”

The True Light is Jesus Christ and the light he gives is hope for an eternal future and a love unsurpassed. We failed in the Garden and we failed in the Commandments, but in Christ there is no failure in those who seek him, there is no burden that he will not take from you and there is no sin too great for his forgiveness. But, even so, we cannot get complacent in our acknowledged inability to keep the commandments of God...no...they are still legitimate and valid commandments that must be realized.

This is the purpose of the Lenten Season, to come clean, acknowledging our shortcomings, our lack of compassion for our fellow man, our individual pursuits for worldly gain and acceptance. Our Anglican heritage does not engage in celebration theology alone, causing us to deny our sinful dispositions that required the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Yes, we do celebrate God's victory over sin in the God-Man Jesus Christ, but we must always remember why the sacrifice was necessary in the first place. Sin required a payment...God provided it. Sin requires our repentance...God gives us the grace and strength to fight the adversary. In Christ your sins are separated from you and you are seen as pure as the snow. Sin has no hold on you or on me.

It is this spirit of acknowledging the sacrifice of Christ that should bring us to our knees in repentance. The purpose of the Lenten season is to remind us that it is not of our own doing that we get to enter Paradise. In Christ alone is our victory! We need to seek no further. We can find a sense of happiness and joy in this penitential season knowing that God loves us unconditionally, but we must come in a true spirit of graciousness, acknowledging that it was our choices that brought Him to the cross.

What I really want to get across to everyone here today, as we enter the Penitential season of Lent, is the reality and importance of prayer. That is, after all, what we do when we gather together in His name. I started today's service with an exhortation to not neglect coming to the Lord's Table... and I hope you will heed these words. But, I also want to impart to you the importance of coming together for our services of Morning Prayer. The three Sunday services we do here at St. Andrews, Holy Communion, Morning Prayer and the Litany all come together to focus our hearts and minds on the presence of the Almighty in our lives. It is not fair to say that the prayers are repetitious and therefore require no formal corporate joining of voices. That attitude does not bring anyone closer to God. Praying corporately, with other believers, strengthens each of us through the love and support of being part of a church family that worships together. Lent is a perfect time to meditate on our need for prayer individually as well as corporately.

Have you been here long enough to have the prayers memorized? I hope you do have them memorized, because praying is not solely about

the words, but about what's going on in the heart. Once you know the prayers we recite together in Holy Communion, as well as Morning Prayer, then you can take the next step...a deeper step that takes you more fully into the presence of God. As we enter into this Lenten season I would like all of us to consider the importance of both Holy Communion and Morning Prayer as beneficial elements to your spiritual health. All Glory be to God. I will leave you with the inspiring words of St. James:

“And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

(James 5: 15-16)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.