

Sermon: Reformation Sunday

The Rev. Mike Wernick

October 26, 2014

Year A

Jeremiah 31:31–34

Psalm 46

Romans 3:19–28

John 8:31–36

Today's passage from Jeremiah is one of my favorites from the prophets... it resonates with my sense of connection... of mutual indwelling... of intuition... and interdependence... but it also brings to mind images of chaos theory... yes... chaos theory... of Grand Central Station... where from one of the balconies... the view seems totally chaotic... people moving about randomly... going this way and that... a sea of squirming activity... but beneath the surface... every person knows where they're headed... and they navigate through the crowd and around each other with purpose... a deep sense of order... and hopefully some grace...

Today's passage reminds me of a colony of bees... each with a different job... a specific task... not one teaches another... or says to another... *here are the rules*... yet they all work together seamlessly to achieve their common purpose... building a hive... caring for their young... sharing the fruits of their labors...

Today's passage reminds us that the heart is more than just a pump... and even though many in successful America have learned to deny its deepest longings... it is a seat of energy... an organ of perception... the eyes may be the doorway to the soul... but the heart connects us with each other... and all of creation... but like the old covenant... this new one expects us to live upright lives... to defend the cause of the poor and needy... because we are connected to them... and this renewed covenant is possible only because God is willing to forgive iniquity... and not remember sin... our hope lies in a God who forgives and forgets... the way we forgive those who sin against us...

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in them... that the truth would set them free... and they bristled... became indignant... *what do you mean set us free... we have never been slaves to anyone...*

That's difficult for me to believe... they may not have had to do any of the things we associate with slavery... but the honor / shame code under which ancient people lived... was an even deeper form of slavery... it kept far too many people bound in other kinds of shackles... and it's not too much better for some of us now...

Now here's where what I say... and what you hear... can get dicey... so please bear with me... I do think there are some good reasons sometimes... to bite one's tongue... to catch yourself before saying what's about to fall out of your mouth... we sometimes speak in haste... only to realize that what's been said... has been insensitive... or has hurt someone's feelings... there's an ancient proverb that says: *words are like arrows... once they leave the bow... they can't be withdrawn...*

Of course... people can be selfish... inconsiderate... and rude... Or they can be polite... have manners... and consider what others think and how they feel... but it's also possible for someone to be just on the verge... just on the cusp of doing or saying something... and stop dead in their tracks... not because they would have regretted it... not because it would have been hurtful... but because they were more concerned... with what others might think about them... than they were about simply being who they are... with being themselves... with being who God created them to be...

Like the Jews to whom Jesus spoke... I too am a descendent of Abraham... my family tells me that we're from the tribe of Levi... appropriate perhaps... but I spent too many years *not* being free... too many years in other kinds of shackles... too many codependent years being more of a slave to what others would think about me... than I was about simply being who I was created to be...

And too many people in this country... instead of being in the moment... instead of speaking and acting with the innocence and spontaneity of a Forrest Gump... instead of being as transparent as we'd like... calculate the imagined effects of saying this or saying that... of doing this or doing that... of whether it'll make us look good or bad... of whether it'll advance Empire or Kingdom... and as a culture... we pick Empire far too often...

And in the last sixteen years... as I've become a little bit free-er... I've learned to favor what my heart says... over what I think others might say... I've become more comfortable following my intuition... following where the Holy Spirit leads... and am less concerned about how rational it may be... how much sense it may make to others... I have for example walked out of a place... just because I felt the impulse to do so in that moment... I have asked the Holy Spirit to guide me to where some lost item was... and she sometimes assists... I've made friends with sometimes being inconsistent... And I've talked before about my seminary experience of Formation... in our case... it included things like *lectio divina*... praying with icons... centering prayer... praying the Anglican rosary... and yes... I actually did find something about a Lutheran rosary...

Formation is important for our ministries... but it's more than just education... it requires our intellectual... emotional... spiritual... and physical... growth and development... all of which need to be as fully integrated as possible... and in living into who God created us to be... the aim is not to conform to a universal... pre-existing Christian ideal... but to a deep transformation of our entire selves... as members of the body of Christ... and transformation never ceases...

On this Reformation Sunday... we lift up... and appreciate Martin Luther's desire for self-examination... for re-formation... but we remember too... that Luther didn't intend to start the Protestant Reformation any more than Jesus intended to begin a new religion... both of them wanted reform in the traditions out of which they came... from the traditions they loved... both of them resonated with a deep truth they knew inside...

and wanted those traditions to embody the best of what they could possibly offer... and both of them were theological whistleblowers... both of them encountered resistance... and some of that resistance was clothed in Kingdom... but talked like Empire... like when the church disliked the idea of NOT selling indulgences... because it would lose money... some of that resistance talked the talk... but didn't walk the walk...

And reformation is necessary... because otherwise we get stuck in a rut... otherwise we think the way it is... is the way it's always been... and what's exciting about reformation... is that as we discover new things about our humanity... about ourselves... and about the world in which we live through things like... OH... quantum physics and cosmology... we're able to shine a new light... maybe a more helpful light... on the things that matter...

And the truth is... that we are... in every moment... being formed... I'm being formed by my relationship with Joel... and our children... I'm being formed by my family and what's going on with my parents right now... I'm being formed by what's happening with and in our Two Churches... as I believe many of you are...

And reformation is critical... because when we maintain a mental death-grip on an idea... or belief... when we've made our preferences or opinions into absolutes... when our thinking or action is so rigid... when we won't... or can't budge... then there's also no room for the Holy Spirit to enter into us... and work us like warm clay...

Thomas Merton wrote: *You don't need to know precisely what's happening, or exactly where it's all going. What you need... is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment... and to embrace them with courage... faith... and hope.*

So if we are created in the image of God... then we're also created to create... and creation involves not only courage... faith... and hope... but change... so let's be even

more willing to have... as Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber says... divine heart transplants... so that as we continually die and are reborn on our Christian walk... we can replace our hearts of stone... with beating hearts of flesh... to not change... is to die... and we are a people of eternal life... Holy God... help us choose life.

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