

The Second Sunday in Lent – Year C
March 17, 2019
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- SERMON -

We are in the season of Lent! That season of about 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter.

So, what is Lent?

Yes, it is traditionally a time of fasting, repentance and spiritual discipline, but toward what purpose?

Our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, describes it saying, the purpose of the Loving, Liberating and Life-giving Lent is a season when we set aside time for reflection on Jesus Christ. And for reflection on who we are and who we want to be.

Those words “who we are and who we want to be” implies that who we are does not need to be the end all.

“Who we are and who we want to be” implies that tomorrow we can be better than we are today. That we can rise above our past, as well as our present. That’s powerful!

How many of you saw the movie “My Big Fat Greek Wedding”? Well, if you didn’t, the movie revolves around a woman named Toula Portokalos, and her family. Toula was tired of where she was in life. She didn’t like who she had become and wanted to improve herself and move forward in life, but she felt stuck, in a rut, and hopeless.

She was sharing her feelings with her brother, Nick, and Nick said to her, “Don’t let your past dictate who you are, but let it be part of who you will become.”

Toula said, “Nick, that’s beautiful.” And he said, “Yeah, that Dear Abby really knows what she’s talking about.”

Nick’s statement to Toula is worth repeating:

Don’t let your past dictate who you are, but let it be part of who you will become.

We are not bound by our past. We CAN be transformed.

Our 2nd reading today in Romans is one of my favorite passages. Romans Chapter 12, verses 1 and 2 starts with, “So, brother and sisters...”

When you start a sentence with the word “So”, doesn’t that refer to what was said before? Otherwise, it reminds me of someone coming up to me and saying, “So, how YOU doin’?” Or, “So, what’s a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?”

No, in the context of Paul’s letter to the Romans he was saying, “So, based on all you just read...” In the NIV or KJV versions, the word, “Therefore” is used. “Therefore, brothers and sisters...”

What was the “therefore” there for? It is there to refer back to all he had been saying prior to Chapter 12. Chapters 1 – 11 talked about –

- God’s righteousness being revealed,
- talked about God’s faithfulness and justice,
- explained that all have sinned,
- but that all can receive God’s righteousness through faith,
- that we can have peace with God through his grace,
- we can have new life in Christ and be set free by the Spirit.

THEREFORE – SO – BECAUSE of all of this, brothers and sister, BECAUSE of God’s mercies explained before, “...I encourage you to present your bodies as a LIVING sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. ... DON’T be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be TRANSFORMED (How?) by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out, what God’s will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.”

His whole point in this reading was to encourage them, and us, to be TRANSFORMED by the renewing of our minds.

The Transforming begins with the renewing of our minds.

How do we renew our minds?

Renewing our minds is to move FROM being conformed to the patterns of this world, TO understanding what God’s will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.”

One way to begin is in prayer, asking God to help us in areas of our life that need to be renewed, transformed, and strengthened.

There is a ‘Prayer for the Church’ found in The Book of Common Prayer (p. 816). This prayer is for the Church as a whole, but the Church is made up of individuals. Therefore, I will read this aloud, but I will read it in a personal way rather than as to the Church as a whole. You read this to yourself as you listen. Okay?

Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy catholic Church (*which is made up of individuals*). Fill it (me) with all truth, IN all truth with all peace. Where it is (I am) corrupt, purify it (me). Where it is (I am) in error, direct it (me); where in any thing it is (I am) amiss, reform it (me). Where it is (I am) right, strengthen it (me); where it is (I am) in want, provide for it (me); where it is (my

relationships are) divided, reunite it (them); for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Savior.
Amen.

We all have a past. Some, not so bad. Some, not so good. But it is our past.

Whatever it is, our past shapes us, but does not DEFINE us. No matter what has gone on before, God can still work with our "clay." Our human past is one where we learned to deal with life, perhaps using violence and trickery, but God is and has been calling all of humanity throughout the ages, calling you and me, into a different way, the way modeled by Jesus, but when we are conformed to this world we certainly act like "we don't want that."

In our Gospel reading this morning Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who were sent to you! How often I have wanted to gather your people, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you didn't want that."

And even though the old way seemed to win when Jesus was killed, God's way endures! The Reign of God is near . . . and we can begin to be transformed into its likeness NOW through renewal.

When we talk about renewal of our minds, I need to share with you that this is a key purpose of our RenewalWorks program. Presiding Bishop Curry encourages use of RenewalWorks, which is a ministry in the Episcopal Church that focuses on spiritual growth by deepening love of God and neighbor in the lives of congregations, in the lives of ministries that animate those congregations, and in the lives of the individuals who bring life to those ministries.

We've had two workshops so far focusing on where we've been and where we are. Two more coming up. I encourage you to come. The information is in the Weekly News.

Ah Lent! The Loving, Liberating and Life-giving Lent – a season when we set aside time for reflection on Jesus Christ. And for reflection on who we are and who we want to be. Daily being transformed by the renewing of our mind as we learn to know our Creator and understand what His will is.

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