



When ALL is said and DONE, What will matter to our Heavenly Father will be how well we have Kept Our Covenants and how much we have tried to follow the example of our Savior, Jesus Christ. *Linda S. Reeves*

March 17th Sunday Lent 5 Jeremiah 31:31-34

How fickle the hearts and minds of many

As we approach Holy Week and find our way to the Cross, we will have plenty of opportunities to reflect on the way believers can so easily turn away from the ways of God and pursue an “idea” of God far from the one revealed to us in the Bible. Turning away from Jesus is relatively easy to do. It can happen while we are all the time convincing ourselves that we are faithful believers, disciples following their Master.

Turning away from Jesus is so easy to do, easy in the sense that the Jesus from whom we are turning was never the real Jesus of Nazareth, God’s Son in the first place. The content of our faith – the person of Jesus – does not impinge on our daily living. While God is demanding a total submission to everything God demands, we prefer to stick to a “comfortable” Jesus.

If we truly believed in the Jesus revealed to us in the Scriptures, we would not rebel. We would humble ourselves before the glory of God and stand with Him on Golgotha. From that perspective we would see our lives and the lives of others in a very different way.

It is only by engaging with The Son of God made man that we know the will of God and are able to see our need for repentance. Pray daily. Immerse ourselves in the Scriptures. Reach out to offer healing, mercy, love, works of charity and engagement with the family of God in His Church. Then, and only then, can we have confidence that the God on whom we are building our lives is the One True God and not some god of our own creation.

We believe and rebel at same time?

Faith and Rebellion in the same person? Surely not! To understand the painful reality of this, we only need to look at the paradox unfolding on Palm Sunday. Those who shouted “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday will shout “Crucify him” on Friday. All in the space of a week! They were drawn into the public frenzy to destroy this man who had led them astray, who

promised much but who was now insisting their true home as there with him on Golgotha. It was too much for them to accept how the Way of God was the Way of sacrifice, of humble submission to God. It is about doing things God’s Way and not modifying God’s expectations so that He is not asking too much of us.

First thing is to remove Jesus

Jesus’ opponents will succeed in killing him, but their apparent victory will turn to dust as Jesus emerges from the tomb and begins to draw all people to himself (v. 32). It is from the cross that the Father reveals the Truth about His Son, a Truth about which they had a preview in the Transfiguration.

No Christian really wants to find that he or she is in rebellion. It is too strong a word and we would be ashamed to think such a charge could be made against us. Yet that is exactly what Jesus tells us.

Christianity has become too much about us and not about “the other”. We can acknowledge God as Almighty and Lord of all whilst at the same time acting in ways contrary to the teachings of Jesus on living in the Kingdom.

How do we know? Prayer, Bible reading, fellowship. If we are not loving others, all others, loving without exception and building a world of founded on love, mercy, patience and works of charity, then we do not know God. These are the lifestyles God wants.

The road to glory is about servanthood. That was true for Jesus, and it is true for all who follow him. Like Jesus, we are expected to be faithful even unto death and to trust that God will vindicate us. We must be foot washers.

John 12:26

Jesus spoke of the importance of living as He lived, doing what He did. *Where I am, there will my servant also be* is the way Jesus presented His promise. As we go about carrying out the will of the Father, we do so empowered by divine grace. God does not call us to do anything without first providing all we need to be faithful. If we are united to Christ in all we do, we will succeed, the Gospel will advance throughout the wider community and our local parishes will be a bright shining witness of the benefits of faith. This will happen, not because of what we do/did. The world will be transformed through the Christ within us. We plant seeds. God grows them.

But not everyone appreciated Jesus for who He was – the Christ of God. The leaders of the Jews could not welcome Him as the Messiah. They tied themselves to the very things the Son had come to fulfil.

It is helpful to remember how these things unfolded for Israel. The Jewish authorities who called for Jesus' death will soon see their temple levelled and their nation in ruins. Pagans would wander through the Temple and strange gods would be honoured in a land that once sang the praises of the One True God.

Even the mighty Rome Empire herself, that nation which was the very personification of worldly power, will fall to barbarians soon enough. But none of this could be laid at the feet of Jesus. He was no warrior messiah. Jesus trod the path of suffering and servanthood, called into being a kingdom that has survived where everything else has fallen. The self-styled sophisticates of today might well scorn Christ and tyrants kill his disciples, but the church founded by God continues to weather every criticism, ever persecution and outlive every tyrant. Even when Christians themselves seem to be doing their best to tear the Body of Christ a part from within it is the Son of Man who binds together those who persevere in faithfulness.

It is for this reason Lent is so important for all of us. Faithfully pursued through personal lives of discipline and spiritual activities we intentionally

re-evaluate every aspect of our faith lives. We prayerfully discern the place God *truly* has in our daily activities; the way we celebrate Christ in those we meet and join with our brothers and sisters to celebrate the sacraments. No element of our lives should escape examination. Nothing should be beyond the call to transformation so that all we are and all we do gives glory to Almighty God.

Jeremiah understood this all too well

Jeremiah was addressing Israel at a time the people were living under the shadow of a mighty Babylonian conquest. In those dark times he declared that nothing short of a total transformation of life was required. They had to move away from relating to God through laws and commandments. They had to know God, celebrate God within their hearts and ensure everything they did was done through a heavenly filter. That is still true today. If our words and deeds cannot hold up under the glare of the Gospel, then we must abandon them. We live in a *new* creation, a creation brought about through the loving mercy of the Father in Heaven and God has expectations of us.

What then is new about the “new” covenant? The new covenant involves a surgical procedure, re-writing the human heart. The biblical understanding of the “heart” is that it is the centre of human intellect and will, knowing what is right and having the desire to do it. Jesus wants nothing less than a whole new spiritual DNA, one that will flavour all we do with the grace and mercy of God.

Jeremiah promises that God will replace this deeply engraved sinful heart with a new heart, one engraved with God's law, written in God's own handwriting (**Jeremiah 31:33**; see **Ezekiel 36:26** for a similar image). People will obey not because they are supposed to obey but because they naturally want to give thanks and glory to God. Obedience will become a “habit” for us, second nature. We will love God and neighbour because we cannot imagine any other way of living. Our lives flow out of what God is saying to us through Scriptures and in our prayers. This is authentic New Covenant living.