

Good Friday 2021 - sermon notes

The problem is sin. Those three little letters contain the concept that continues to baffle philosophers and traps people into life long bondage. The word speaks of 'missing the mark', 'going where we are not supposed to go', and 'disobeying commands' It is what has prevented the human race from becoming what it was created to be - a shining image of the Creator of the universe. When Adam and Eve took that fateful step of following the serpent in the garden rather than following God's instruction the image of God in humanity was marred and corrupted. While the image of God was not completely removed from humanity the damage that was done has caused suffering, pain and death for all the generations. In order to repair the damage caused the Creator took some very serious steps to bring humanity back to its design. The Heavenly Potter is determined to make the vessel he has in mind and so we come to this decisive moment in that whole process.

The story of the restoration includes the Covenant made between God and Abraham. The initiative for entering into covenant came from God and depended on the voluntary response of Abraham to God's call. The voice of God communicated an offer to make of Abraham a family more numerous than the sands on the shore of the ocean and Abram 'believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness'. Abraham was indeed an important part of the recovery project for all of humanity but he too was a flawed human being. A re-ordering of the priorities in Abraham and Sarah's life was required and it took some time for it to take place. There were missteps and false starts. 'Missing the mark, going where they were not supposed to go, and disobeying commands' were part of their lives but the Covenant God was not moved to revoke the covenant.

When the time of Moses came the nation had grown in size but not in understanding. The wonderful rescue from bondage thrust the nation into the wilderness where they were totally dependant on God to provide for them and guide them. There were missteps and false starts. 'Missing the mark, going where they were not supposed to go, and disobeying commands' were part of their lives as recounted in the book of Exodus. The priorities of their lives were challenged and they were asked to allow God and God's ways to become the most important things in their lives. The Covenant God remained faithful to the Promise and so the nation of Israel was allowed to return to the Promised Land.

Under David's leadership the people of God caught a glimpse of God's sovereignty and the nation grew in size and influence but there were still some missteps and false starts. 'Missing the mark, going where they were not supposed to go, and disobeying commands' were still part of their lives as recounted in the books of Samuel, and Kings. The Covenant God remained faithful to the Promise but the consequences of disobedience were beginning to affect the nation. People looked for solutions everywhere except where the solution really was.

Throughout history people have looked for solutions to the problems brought on by sin.

Sometimes the solutions found are somewhat effective but they always run up against the reality that human solutions will not be able to accomplish the task of dealing once and for all with 'missing the mark, going where we are not supposed to go, and being disobedient to God's commands. The work of God that Jesus was doing on Good Friday was the only thing that would once and for all deal with sin. The act of crucifixion and all that surrounded it was essential to God's plan of restoration. First, because it exposed the inadequacy of human solutions. The most powerful government on the planet at that time was proven to be powerless to prevent the death of an innocent man. Even though Pilate appeared to acknowledge Jesus' innocence he felt powerless when faced with the crowds to absolve Jesus of the charges that had been laid. The Roman government which routinely used force to get their way did nothing to prevent an innocent man from being crucified. Placating the crowd was more important to Pilate than seeing justice done. As important as government is to provide order to society the government held no real solutions. Neither did the religious system of the day. Jesus was an acclaimed miracle worker and a man who spread goodness wherever he went. But the religious leaders failed to acknowledge God's hand in the same way their ancestors failed to acknowledge God's hand in the prophets. In a telling scene Jesus once said "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem how I have wanted to gather you under my wings as a hen gathers her chicks but you would not". The system of ceremonies which was designed to point people to God failed to recognize God in their very midst. As important as the religious systems might be they do not hold the ultimate solution to sin. And finally the common people were also shown to not hold the solution but proved themselves to be fickle and untrustworthy. Even the disciples of Jesus were shown to be inadequate to the task. All of this was exposed through the trial and the act of indictment and it was all put to death when Jesus died. You see the only way for sin to finally be dealt with was for it to be crucified along with Jesus. The sinless spotless lamb that was sacrificed cleansed the world from the power of sin to rule and govern humanity's heart. The proof that the sacrifice was sufficient came three days later when the power of the resurrection brought Jesus back to life into a new and wonderful age.

There have been people more eloquent than I who have spoken about this reality and people who have been able to express these truths from a more scholarly perspective but I know deep in my heart that it was God's desire to restore all things in Christ that caused him to be such an intimate part of the solution. Jesus once said, "I only do what I see the Father doing" and so, in a way we may never understand, Jesus was doing what he had seen the Father doing when he hung on the cross and died. Our Creator, both Redeemed and Sanctified us through the work of His Messiah and the Holy Spirit. May we experience a renewal as we walk the rest of the way to Easter.