

First SUNDAY IN LENT



*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.(Ecclesiastes 3)*

Lent is such a time. A time for us to reflect and discern in between the seasons of Epiphany and Easter. In between the time of light when God is made manifest to us. The time of resurrection when no matter what has happened during our lifetime was can be assured of our being called back into God's heart following our death. In our fast-paced world it is easy to go from one thing to the next to the next with scarcely a breath between, let alone time to reflect, repair ourselves physically and emotionally, and set a new path forward intentionally.

The other day I had a conversation, if you could even call it that, with someone who was beyond distraught at all the talk of the Russian hacking and the belief that such hacking changed the outcome of the election. I was astounded at the vehemence of my companion that hacking did not occur and even if it did it could not have changed the outcome. I was astounded at this vehemence in someone who had been, in my experience of them up until that point, fairly mild-mannered and soft-spoken. Something had pushed them over the edge into a place of being unable to step back and discuss rationally what had led to this outburst. In truth, I was relieved that the conversation had not escalated further when the person stomped away.

Earlier that same day I had been at a meeting where sanctuary was discussed. At least one of the parishes in this Diocese is installing a shower in their building so that one or more persons who have received orders of deportation can take sanctuary in the church. It may not actually come to anyone living in that church but I wondered about what a life lived within four walls with no ability to go outside to bask in the sun or feel the breeze of summer would be like. Would it end up being worse in the long run? I do not know what will come of these steps but the world that we knew – or thought we knew – just a year ago is no more and for so many reasons it has changed materially and in my mind, not for the better.

Despite these events, Jesus is still with us as we go about our daily routines. Jesus shows us how to resist temptation- whatever form the temptation takes. Whether the lure is of food, adulation, power or something else, temptation is all around us. Remaining centered on the Gospel values of love of God and care for neighbor help us resist such temptation. And, we do not have to agree on the particulars of how to live out those Gospel values.

The reading from Genesis has been interpreted by many as the story of original sin. The basis for our separation from God. The reason that Jesus was needed to become incarnate and show us how we are supposed to live and, ultimately, how to die.

Keep in mind that the serpent is crafty and not evil. After all, God created the serpent and God said in Genesis 1:27 that all that God created was good and indeed very good. How, then, can the serpent be evil if the serpent was created by God?

For many ages, women have been blamed for eating the fruit and so the reasoning goes, the woman tempts the man into eating. Note, if you will, that the man was with the woman and heard what the serpent said and did nothing and said nothing other than also eating the fruit. So perhaps both men and women are equally to blame, if you have to blame somebody, for failing to follow God's instructions not to eat of the tree of good and evil. Indeed, I suspect there is enough blame to go around for everybody so we should not spend our time casting blame but rather spend our time determining what tempts us and shoring up our abilities to resist those temptations particularly difficult for us. Our Collect reminds us that what tempts you may not tempt me and vice versa when we prayed: *Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.*

And remember from the Penitential Order we read at the beginning of our service this morning:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:8, 9

Self-awareness is rarely easy and takes courage. Perhaps this is one way in which the liturgical season of Lent can be a blessing. Renita Weems reminds us that "blessings bless and blessings cost."¹ We have the blessing of God who encourages us and supports us as we walk through Lent. We are born of a God who calls us God's own regardless of how and when we are tempted regardless of what form the serpent comes to us to sow discord, mistrust and misunderstanding between us.

Remember that *Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, [we may] with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:14.* Use this season of Lent to search your soul. Bring to God those ways in which you have been tempted to live in ways contrary to the two Great Commandments. Do not be afraid to bring to God those things of which you are ashamed for God always welcomes you back with loving arms.

¹ Renita Weems. Listening for God (Simon & Schuster, 1999).