Sermons at Christ Church

Be God's Light That Shines In The darkness.

Pentecost X
The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

The Old Testament reading for this morning recounts the story of the prophet Nathan who goes to King David and tells him a grim story about a rich man and a poor man who lived in a certain city. This rich man had so much flock. But the poor man had one lamb which he adored. The rich man had a guest, and in his desire to prepare a feast for his guest, he took the poor man's only lamb and prepared a feast for his guest.

The King was enraged, he was so mad that he pronounced judgement on the rich man. This man deserves to die, he said. His deeds would not go unpunished. He shall restore the lamb four-fold. He shall pay back with penalty that which he took unjustly from another man. I can picture the look on the prophet's face as he looked at the king express his anger and disdain for the rich man. I can hear the silent wondering of the prophet, what does this man think he is doing? I hope he doesn't think he is fooling me because he is condemning that same evil in the rich man but not in himself.

As the king's screams of anger echoed throughout the palace built with cedar, the prophet uttered these words "you are the man." David, you are the man. These words pierced the king's heart. It was like a stab, not at the back, but right in his chest, where it had the maximum impact. Think about it this way, all that the prophet did was to simply hold the mirror for the king, and when he looked in the mirror, he didn't see the rich man who had forcibly taken the poor man's lamb, he saw himself-a broken man. A guilty man. A shattered man. A man who knew instantly that he had not lived according to his call. The king did not disagree with the prophet nor did he fight back. He knew what he had done-he had violated three commandments; thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not commit adultery and thou shall not covet thy neighbor's wife. The king had betrayed not only the trust of his people, but of the God who chose him as a shepherd from the field and made him king over his people. God chooses us and calls us from the fields or wherever and adorns us with grace. Our task is to be mindful of God's call by always holding our mirrors to our own faces, just so we can get rid ourselves of the evil we condemn in others.

The mirror that the prophet held for the king was way too powerful for the king to look at. The mirror of our lives is often way too powerful for us to look at. But if we don't look in that mirror, we cannot make the changes that we need to make. One good thing about any mirror is that it doesn't deceive. It doesn't hold back information. You don't see what you want to see, you see as is. The mirror provides us with the perfect reflection of who we are-people who are double in ourselves. People who cannot rid themselves of all the stuff that they condemn in others.

What I have come to find out is that we hate to look in the mirror because when we do, we don't see anyone but our broken selves, the double selves and the contradictions we carry with us and live with.

For me, the humbling part of David's story was the moment he looked in the mirror and saw his double-the contemptuous part of him. In that mirror, David saw his brokenness, but he wasn't content with it, he reached out to the God who washes us with hyssop to make us clean. Out of the prison of his own soul, David cries out. "Have mercy on me O God according to your loving kindness. In your compassion blot out my offences."

The power in these words is that we do not sense any hubris in him. David's confession tells of his acknowledgment, not only of the evil he had done, but the loving kindness of the God who pursues us in our recklessness, receives us in our sinfulness, holds us together in our brokenness, comforts us with soothing words of redemption, frees us from the perils of darkness and feeds us with more than bread.

In the gospel story we hear of the people looking for Jesus. They wanted to be filled. Not with bread, but with something more than bread. You and I also seek to be filled. But with what? We run on empty tanks but pretend we are full. We hunger for connection, fulfillment, renewal and grace but pretend that all is well. We look around for solace and comfort, but we look in the wrong places and so we are always sullen with no sense of purpose of direction.

Here's a question, if you were the prophet hearing the condemnation of the rich man by the king, what would you have done? Would you look at the king with disdain or show some pity because of his brokenness?

Reflecting on the saga of King David reminds me of these words by a prominent Frenchman "We are, I know not how, double in ourselves. So that what we believe, we disbelieve, and cannot rid ourselves of what we condemn." We cannot rid ourselves of the very evil we see in others.

And so the question this morning is not about how broken you are, but what do you condemn about others but cannot rid yourself off of it? Who do you see when you look in the mirror? Is that person familiar to you? If that person you see in the mirror isn't familiar to you, can you find you in the mirror? A much sober question is, what is the measure of our sins in relation to God's mercies? Our sins are never enough!!

King David was fully aware that he could not change the past, but he knew that for the sake of the future he would have to count on the mercy and compassion of the God who makes us pure and clean and bears our sins for we cannot bear them by ourselves. And for the sake of the future life that we all have to live, David prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Can we rid ourselves of what we condemn? I believe we can. With a pure heart and a right spirit, we can. There is a story about a waitress who stole from her employers. Twenty years later, she sent an apology and one thousand dollars to her former employers. She grew up in the church, she wrote, never stole before and never has since she was fired. Talk about ridding yourself of that which you condemn. The point is that when we believe that we have been called by God into the fellowship of God's people-the church, our lives ought to reflect the character of the new temple we have become. The Church as it were becomes our mirror. And in so far as the Church continues as our mirror, like Paul, we need to also consider ourselves as prisoners in the Lord, people who are both empowered and constrained by the message of the gospel, people who live and thrive on the message of the gospel, people who would go looking for Jesus, not solely for bread, but for something more than bread-the good news.

When you are a prisoner in the Lord, you seek to be fed, not with the food that perishes, but with the food that yields to eternal life-the good news. When you are held in hostage by the message of the gospel, you seek not signs and symbols but you look for substance, you pursue the life changing message that drops down like manna from heaven. When you are fed with the bread that gives life, you live a life that is worthy of your calling because you know who it is that took you from the pasture, made you a king and adorned you with grace.

Those who feed on this bread not only abide in Christ and Christ in them, but they are never satisfied if what they see in the mirror does not reflect the will of God. Because they abide in Christ and Christ in them, they make things right, they do things right, they look in the right places for healing and fulfillment, they look in the mirror and they rid themselves of the evil they condemn in others. I pray that you may always abide in Christ and have more than enough courage to rid yourself of the evil you condemn in others. Amen.

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