

Lessons from the Potter: Yielding ©

Isaiah 64:1-9; Matthew 11:28-30

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Some of you may have already read the Scriptures for this morning, if you had a copy of the Lenten Meditation Guide that I handed out on Ash Wednesday.

There are more copies in the narthex, plus a document titled Lent 101 for you to pick up if you wish, and I hope you will and that many of us will be meditating on the Scriptures that lead up to these five Sundays in Lent.

The Old Testament passage that was the key Scripture for meditation that Bob read this morning is from Isaiah. Not long before that chapter, the Israelites were ecstatic because they were being released from their oppression and were free to return to Jerusalem after many years of being held captive in Babylon. They were giving thanks and praise to God – to Yahweh – for their freedom and the opportunity to return home.

But here they are sounding so hopeless – their lives feel void of God – they feel God has left them, turned completely away – so much so that they almost blame God for their turning to sin. They have returned to Jerusalem to find every thing destroyed. They are facing great hardship and are up against insurmountable mountains of work.

Of all the times in their lives, they sure do need to know God is with them now!

Have you ever had a time when you simply could not feel God near? When you cried out “where are you, God?” Has there ever been a time when you just weren’t really sure that God was with you?

I think sometimes that is what Lent is about – or some of it. We often begin Lent with Jesus going to the wilderness to spend 40 days there, being tempted by Satan. He was fasting – he was hungry, he was thirsty, he was physically weak and he was tempted to give in so he might have strength and food and power.

The three times Jesus seems to have felt that God was not near was in the wilderness being tempted just before he began his ministry, and in the garden, crying and praying, sweating drops of blood, asking for God to take the cup of death from him, if only it would be God’s will.

And then on the cross when He cried “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” So, if there were times when even Jesus, God’s own Son felt left alone by God, surely it is okay for us to admit that our lives have felt that way at one time or another as well.

Many people sense God’s loving presence when a loved one has died, when they are in grief. But there are some who have cried out asking “Where are you? Why are you so far from me when I need you most?”

The psalmist speaks about being in a dark pit, unable to get out. Sometimes we feel that we have slid into that pit and we will never find our way out. Yet, where is God, why is God so silent? How long will it be before God reaches down and draws me out?

But then Isaiah says – almost as if he were reminding God – “You are our Father, we are the clay and you are the potter. We are your children. Remember?”

God is really never far away from us. But could it be that God will allow us a time of feeling alone – alone with our regrets, alone to really think about what we need to repent of; alone to come to realize that we really, really need God!

I once ran away from home. It doesn't matter that I was 65 years old. I'm kidding, of course, although there are times that I wish I could run away and just hide from adult problems.

But, when I was around six I got mad at my mom and said “I'm running away!” Well, she didn't react as I thought she would. She didn't cry or beg me to stay. She actually said, “I'll help you pack.”

I refused her help, packed a few things in a little suitcase and went out the back door. All she said was, “You can come back when you're ready.”

Ha! I would show her! I would stay out all night and she would worry about me.

Well, I went out to the garage that was not attached but not very far from the house either. It was colder than I expected. I sat down on a bench in the garage and shed a few tears. Then I just sat and got really bored. And then I started feeling sad and afraid and very, very empty because as close as my mother was, she might as well have been 100 miles away. I was alone. Alone with my childish self.

And, I was hurt that she didn't come out to stop me from leaving. I was hurt that she didn't come looking for me. I was angry and hurt, feeling alone and like nobody cared.

We used to sing that song – “Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, I'm going out to eat worms.” Well, I might as well of just eaten a big plate full of worms. That's how bad I felt.

Finally, it got really dark and I was over the whole running away thing. I just wanted my warm, loving mother to hold me and sing to me and assure me of her love.

So, I went back into the house. And, she was actually standing at the door, looking out, watching – waiting – for me to come in. I opened the door and started crying and she took me in her arms and held me and welcomed me home. She assured me that everything was alright. That I was alright. That she loved me and that I always had a place right there with her.

Somehow, I think it is that way with God. God really hasn't gone anywhere, but is like a mother waiting and watching with open arms when we decide to return.

I think Isaiah refers to the potter and the clay because he knows there is such a close, important relationship between the two. The Creator and the creation are intimately known. But the clay is nothing but a hard, cold lump without the potter. Only the potter has the ability to shape and to mold and to lovingly lift that clay up into a beautiful, new shape.

God was there with the Israelites, but maybe they needed time to realize how much they needed God. Maybe they needed some time to grasp their own sin in turning away from God. But we know from reading the rest of the story – the Bible – that God continued to lead and guide and love, even to the point of sending His own Son to forgive, not only them but US.

Do you ever feel alone? Like you're walking through the wilderness without a destination or purpose? Like you're spinning around and around unsure of how to stop.

Maybe that is part of the Lenten journey, because maybe we need space and time to think about where we are in our relationship with God.

But I promise you this – God is close; ready; waiting to welcome you home when you finally realize that you cannot live without Him. You cannot stand the prospect of trying to make it on your own; of trying to be in control of things that should be up to God, and God alone, to control.

Yield your life to Him. He welcomes us with open arms. Like the Potter he is, he will take us – cold, hard, lump of dirt that we are – and, with his hands he will work and shape and lovingly transform us into the creation he has in mind.

He is the Potter, we are the clay. It's good to know that God is God and we are not. The pressure is off! Yield your life to him and he will reform, transform you. Jesus says: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.