

Lenten Homily

March 10, 2010

For me, Lent is a time to pay particular attention to Christ within me. The Christ of love, compassion, peace, and justice, who can show me the way to live a life filled with God's grace. I strive during Lent to experience a tiny fraction of what Jesus experienced during his forty days of self-denial and resistance to temptation in the wilderness. I try to meditate on how I can really live the Word and not just intellectually read it and think I understand it. And, I hope to more fully know that Christ, through his death and resurrection, is showing me, and everyone, the way of forgiveness and new life.

This particular season of Lent feels more vital to me than any previous one because I really am, spiritually and literally, about to pursue a new life. This summer, I will be leaving Washington and St. Columba's and the all-too-rational life I have lived up till now in order to embark on a huge leap of faith, to join an intentional community that runs a Christian retreat center in the woods of Minnesota. I will be turning to God in a way I never have before. During the year or two I will spend there, I will seek to discern a new vocation that more genuinely honors the Christ within me.

So, I've been reading the passages of the lectionary with extra care these past three weeks, hoping to gain deeper insight into the meanings of the parables and how my life can be an expression of the Christ within me. And it has been a fulfilling experience so far, until suddenly I came upon today's readings. We seem to have taken a sharp right turn, away from a message of forgiveness and redemption and toward a seemingly punitive message. To hear Jesus say that not one letter nor one stroke of a letter shall pass from the law until all is accomplished leaves me somewhat dissatisfied and distressed. The final verse that is omitted from the lectionary I found especially striking, in which Jesus says, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Yikes! I am seeking grace through faith, but today's message feels like a harsh challenge to follow the letter of the law, or else. I turned to one of my favorite authors, Marcus Borg, in his book entitled, *Jesus*, for some reassurance. There I was reminded of two things: one, that part of Jesus's mission was that of a social reformer, and two, that "the law and the prophets" is a reference to the first two parts of the Jewish Bible; "the law" does not just mean rules as we think of them and as are found in the book of Deuteronomy.

Borg states that the Torah contains "some of the most radical social legislation in history" and that Jesus is, as Martin also said on Sunday, giving his listeners, us, an urgent wake-up call to fulfill God's kingdom on Earth. And, God's kingdom on Earth, as I learned in the DOCC course at the Cathedral, is, at its root, a world infused with agape, the free and redeeming love of God.

That, in essence, is what Jesus is speaking of. And that is a message I can get into. I will, without worry, return my Lenten focus to seeking the Christ of love, compassion, peace, and justice and to following the way of Christ into a new life. May it be so for you as well. Amen.

James Rostron