

The Cross as a Symbol of **COVENANT**

God is faithful to do, what we can never do for ourselves.

I am fascinated by people's view on Lent. In her blog, Megan (*don't ask!*) says, "Fat Tuesday has come and gone, ... If you decide to drastically give up **ALL** sweets, you could just as easily wind up face-planting into a pint of Ben & Jerry's before you know it! (And if you already suffer from a case of Catholic guilt, the last thing you need is *more* guilt...)" She concludes, "I think Lent is a great time to **challenge your vices** ... I definitely plan on challenging a few vices of my own (Coffee <- I'm looking at you.)"¹.

Lent has become an annual ritual of entering a 40-day rehab to detox our bodies (and for some, their minds) of things **we** have defined as "vice" and "sin", things we know are not good for us, but we seem unable to control, unable get away from, and unable get rid of!

I am now convinced, giving up your nightly medication of 7 grams of Thornton's Continental Delight, or a wee dram of *Martell's Cordon Bleu Cognac*, will **NOT** take you closer to God. Enjoy them if you must, but giving them up for Lent, will not deepen your relationship with God!

This Lent, we take a different view. Jesus said, *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me*², so we hitch our wagon onto His, and journey with Him to the cross on which He died.

Last Sunday we examined the cross as a symbol of sin. Satan's vain efforts to tempt Jesus to act on His own and satisfy His physical need (turn stones into bread to satisfy your hunger), to test God's love by acting foolishly and irresponsibly (throw yourself off the highest point of the Temple and God will make sure you are not hurt because He loves you), and offer Jesus what was not his to offer, the rag-tag kingdoms of this world ruled by self-obsessed, greedy and conceited people, when God

¹ <http://detoxinista.com/2012/02/the-lent-pendulum/> (on 7 March, 2017)

² John 14:6

had offered Jesus His internal kingdom, such temptations are not very different from those we face daily.

Today, lets look at **the cross as a symbol of COVENANT.**

Last year we examined “covenant” and learned, it is neither a contract nor an agreement, where two parties come together as equals. A covenant is made by one person who is able to commit Himself to do something the other party cannot, or is unable to do.

Covenant Law is used extensively in matters of property. The owner of a property, for example, covenants to sell it to a buyer; as the owner of the land, the seller can enter into a covenant with the buyer, to sell it.

Let me give you a simple example: the relationship between parent and new-born child is an unspoken **covenant**. Both mother and father are in a covenant relationship with their new born child: they are committed to act in the exclusive interest of the infant, to feed, clean, love, entertain, care for, when the infant is unable to do anything in return. Keep this example in mind as we continue.

One of the things **ONLY** God can do which we cannot, is to be **faithful**. God is faithful even when we are not, to Him and to those around us. The prophet Isaiah conveys God saying, *The mountains may move and the hills disappear, but even then my faithful love for you will remain. My covenant of blessing will never be broken,” says the Lord, who has mercy on you.*³

God’s covenant is unique:

- As we said, **Only** God can enter into a unilateral covenant with us; He can do what we cannot.
- God guarantees His covenant by His character: *I love unconditionally, I am merciful, gracious and forgiving, I do not hold your wrong against you ... and I am faithful!*
- He does not place any conditions or requirements on us, to benefit from His covenant.

³ Isaiah 54:10

- God's cannot ever declare His covenant null and void; He cannot cancel it, He cannot retract it nor withdraw it, because God's Word **IS** His Word.

Let's start with Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane before He was taken to the cross. He prays, *Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began*⁴. God's plan for Jesus to surrender His life on the cross, was made **before the world began!**

A few thousand years before Jesus prayed those words, David the shepherd-King prayed a prayer of thanksgiving, *Thank you Lord, for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvellous—how well I know it. Your hands formed my inner parts and you knit me together in my mother's womb. You watched me develop in utter seclusion, as I was being woven together in the darkness of the womb. You saw me **before** I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out, **before** a single day of my life had passed... You know what I am going to say, even **before** I say it, Lord*⁵.

God made a covenant to be Father to us before we were born, before the world was made, when the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit made plans!

What are these plans and why did they have to make them?

These plans had to deal with the person of satan. Last Sunday we noted, satan is a person, not a force or a power. Some refer to him as "evil", but evil is his character, not his name, and we need to address him by name.

Sometimes, we fear to mention his name, because we think he might just turn up, like the mythical genie dressed in drag! *You called, Master?*

In the Kingdom of God, there is only life, which we know as life eternal. When through an act of rebellion and disobedience, satan found himself ousted from the Kingdom of God, he no longer enjoyed the privilege of eternal life; he is the only person who possesses death. This is why Jesus

⁴ John 17:5

⁵ Psalm 139: 13-16 and 4

came and surrender to satan's demand for the death of God. What satan did not know was, eternal life overpowers death. The resurrection of Jesus as the Christ, is the victory over death Jesus has won. This was the plan the Father, and His Son and the Holy Spirit made before the earth was formed! God covenanted to bring us back into His Kingdom of eternal life. So, in the beginning, God created us in His image, to be His presence on earth, to conquer death with life eternal. Sadly, we fell prey to satan's lies. God then chose one man, Abraham through whom He planned to bless the whole world. Again, in the fourth generation after Abraham, satan foiled this by making slaves of the descendants of Abraham in Egypt. 430 years later, God delivered them by a mighty display of His power, liberating them from slavery in Egypt, and destroying Pharaoh's army. As they settled into a new land, God gave them a constitution (a law), the Ten Commandments, which would make them stand out from others; by living lives according to God's Law, they would be different from the peoples of the lands around them.

Psalm 19 which defines and explains the Law of God, tells us why God gave the law to Moses, *by (the Law) is your servant warned; in keeping (the Law), there is great reward.*⁶

Once again, over centuries and millennia, God's Law was perverted with conditions, caveats, provisions, amendments added and attached to it, until God's Law could not be recognised. The simple commandment to keep the Sabbath Holy, was defined as not doing any work, and had all kinds of definitions of what constituted work.

God's plans will succeed because His covenant is everlasting, backed by His character. He sent His Son to do what we could not do: to surrender Himself to the most violent form of death satan could inflict on Him, only to cheat satan of victory, through His resurrection from death.

⁶ Psalm 19:11 (read from 7 ff to appreciate the perfectness of God's Law).

The cross is the perfect symbol of God's Covenant. Those of us who are not part of the covenant by Law, are bound to the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross is the doorway into the presence of God; the cross is the gateway into a relationship with God. At the cross, the covenant of God is fulfilled.

The cross stands as an invitation to anyone and everyone who recognises their personal efforts to lead a "good" life are futile, and in the end, lead away from God.

The cross is an invitation to consider God's covenant. On the cross, God has done something we could never do: His son Jesus cheated satan and defeated death. We **ARE**, , here and now, restored to God's Kingdom, the only place where life eternal is found.

The cross on which Jesus died, demands a simple response from us. Should we choose to believe God's great act of salvation for the human race, you are part of God's eternal kingdom, here and now.

Wouldn't you want this, God's covenant with you, for yourself?

AMEN