

Monday, February 26
Deuteronomy 9:13-21

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON?!?!? As I read this passage, this is the phrase that keeps going through my mind. You have God looking at the children of Israel, those children that had just been liberated from Egypt, while they build a graven image in the wilderness. You have Moses listening to God, the liberating God, say that God was going to bring destruction upon these people who had just been freed from slavery in the first place! And then you have Moses making his way back to the people and witnessing the revelry that is going on in front of this statue. WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON?!?!?! This is life gone mad. God is ready to destroy, and the people have turned their back on their liberator. But if we look again we see an all too familiar situation. The children of Israel had known liberation from God but by this point, they had been wandering in the wilderness for a little while and were clearly feeling uncertain about their future. Moses, their leader, and the closest thing they had to a representation of God on earth, disappeared to go talk with God and I believe that their fear, anxiety and their sense of uncertainty overwhelmed them. When we feel overwhelmed, anxious, we turn back to idols that we have known. Sure, we know that they don't ultimately work, but there is a comfort in going back to what was. The Israelites did it, and we do the same. As we witness God's anger in this text, I believe we see a God that is upset not because of their feelings of anxiety, but because they choose to create idols instead of trusting God's promises. Maybe, instead of focusing on the fact that God was ready to destroy the people, we can recognize the extent to which God is hurt by our reliance upon old idols instead of God's promises. In this Lenten season, we would do well to remember that our actions not only hurt us and limit our own well-being, but that God, our creator, is also hurt when we turn away from the abundant life that has been provided for us.

Meditation

When we are fearful and anxious, what idols are we tempted to worship? What statues do we need to tear down so that God can again be the center of our faith?

PRAYER

Most Gracious and Merciful God, we thank you that even when you become angry with us that you do not destroy us and that you never give up on us. Your continued love for us serves as our anchor each and every time that we stray. Dear liberator help us to recognize the places where we are tempted to build idols and those places in our lives where we are trusting in the wrong things. Bring us

back, O God, to right relationship with you. In your Son's beautiful name we pray, Amen.

Pastor Adkins-Jones

Tuesday, February 27
Deuteronomy 9: 23-10:5

In this very familiar pericope, we find the Israelites led by Moses wandering in the wilderness trying to find their way to the Promised Land. They are stubborn, unruly, and obstinate. In chapter 10 God writes the Ten Commandments down with fire on stone tablets and they are placed in the Ark of the Covenant.

These Ten Commandments serve as initial guidelines for a people who were unaccustomed to freedom. As a college professor, I can tell which students are new to dorm life—away from home for the first time. They tend to go to every party, stay up late, have trouble governing themselves or managing their time. Mother is not standing over their shoulder; teachers are not giving constant reminders of what's due week to week. Some of these students are overwhelmed with the new freedom and power. Inevitably their poor choices result in restrictions and penalties. They have to now adhere to the "Commandments;" external rules/policies of governance. Some fair well, others rebel and some become dependent upon ridged rules to curtail their behavior.

Truth is even more seasoned saints when we find ourselves in the wilderness from time to time, wandering and searching for something (e.g. a better job, healthier marriage, promotion, etc.) or someone. We are sometimes stubborn, unruly and obstinate. We are again in bondage, disobedient Christians trying to do things our own way. Many of us keep looking for external forces, rules and maps to free us but God has placed His word in our hearts. What many of us fail to see is that God freed us from bondage. He provides for us in our wilderness. He takes care of our needs. The sacrifice of Jesus is the final free bill of sale. We are no longer under the law. God has written His new covenant on our hearts.

Meditation

What are we searching for? Why do we find ourselves in these wilderness experiences? When was the last time we took time to seek the face of God? What do we have to learn before we get to the Promised Land?

Prayer

Precious Lord, you are our compass and our light. Please guide us to you. Help us to lean not on our own understanding, but Lord, we look to you. Let us rejoice in knowing we are indeed free. Thank you Heavenly Father for the ultimate sacrifice. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Minister Antoinette Ellis-Williams, Ph.D.

Wednesday, February 28

1st Corinthians 6: 12-18

Whose body is it anyway?

There is an argument going on in these verses, it is a familiar argument. It happened in Corinth and it happens today. We like to deny it, forget it, make excuses and find some saying or scripture that pleads our case or makes a justifiable excuse for it but morality matters. Our bodies house the Holy Spirit. Our faith, our witness, our peace travels through and is evident in our veins and organs, our limbs and muscles. PEOPLE SEE US. Our vision is not just about our eyes but it includes the prophetic witness placed there by God. Our Bodies are Important.

It's Lenten time, a time when we attempt to repent of sinful habits and barriers to healthy living. While we profess our faith in the sanctuary, the question becomes do we profess our faith with our Bodies when folks don't see us. Yes, I know, "bodies" are the hot topic in media today. Assaults and recollections of past misdeeds, excuses and denials abound. Still, WE often agree with the Church of Corinth " **everything is permissible for me**", **we justify our position by including the scriptures "We are free in Christ", " There is no condemnation in Christ", We are forgiven, saved, sanctified and justified" by the Blood of Jesus.** These scriptures fit neatly into our personal narratives of goodness and holiness but they are abused when we consider 'Whose body it is anyway?' The decisions we make with our bodies could estrange us from God. It's not just about SEX, it's about consciousness. Our minds are capable of wrong thinking. Although the apostle has narrowed his discussion to sexual impropriety, in this epistle we need to go deeper.

What goes into the Body is important; when we understand this, we become aware that the treatment of our bodies is part of our worship. We prefer not to

consider our body as temples for the Holy Spirit because temples are beautiful, sacred, and well cared for and given special attention. We know we don't always treat our bodies like God's temple. Too often we are ambivalent when it comes to body sacredness. A view through the lens of our grandparents shows us how careful they were about every touch and bruise, every bath and food item grown and ingested. They invented pomades, elixirs, and ointments and were careful about their gardens and cleansing products.

What is immoral? Anything that attempts to separate us from our creator who lives in us and deserves the best from us.

Meditation: Our body is a Temple-a Temple that houses the Holy Spirit. We are in a relationship with God, not just in mind but also very much in the body. Both the body and the spirit are gifts from God and must be treated as gifts that are precious. To destroy, diminish, abuse or misuse the temple decreases our ability to reverence God. We need our bodies "for God's sake" as our acceptable offering. Let us rethink how we treat our bodies.

Prayer: Lord of Lords, we, Your daughters and we, Your sons too often are negligent, even absent-minded regarding our bodies. We forget that You live inside of us. We forget that You empower us and enable us through our bodies and our minds for good works. In fact, our bodies are NOT our bodies they are YOUR bodies for Your service in the world. Help us, Lord, to develop a new consciousness and therefore a more Holy relationship with You. We Thank You for reminding us in all ways You are Sovereign over our minds, bodies, and spirits. Amen.

Thursday, March 1, 2018

Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28

I can't imagine how Jeremiah must have felt being the bearer of such bad news. You see God gave him a very depressing assignment that made Jeremiah become a very depressed man. He was to tell the people that they needed to change their sinful and wicked ways in order to live as God intended them to live. If not, they would face God's wrath and perish. You see the people of Israel had forgotten God's ways. Instead, they were lying, cheating, stealing, committing adultery, serving other gods, and doing all sorts of other things that were not pleasing to God. Yet, they had been living in this way for so long, that their sinful

actions became normal and acceptable behavior. God had become very angry and decided to destroy the cities and the people in them. Although Jeremiah warned of the destruction that was to come, false prophets told them that everything would be okay. So, they ignored Jeremiah. This deeply hurt Jeremiah who was told by God to keep preaching doom and gloom until the people changed their ways.

Remember the saying, “you reap what you sow.” Meaning, your actions have consequences. For example, if you smoke, do drugs, drink alcohol excessively, or eat bad foods, the consequences can cause health problems. This is similar to what Jeremiah was trying to tell the people. If you neglect God, you will face the consequences. Don’t ever think that you will get away with making bad choices, even if you don’t seem to get caught. God cannot be fooled. He sees everything. When I think of Jeremiah I picture a sad and frustrated man who is running around desperately trying to save people who don’t know that they need saving.

Meditation:

As Christians, our job is to tell people about God and to warn them about the dangers of our society. When He says that He will come again, we should believe it. When He comes looking for us, are you ready? Are your values aligned with His?

Prayer: Father, you have promised to remain forever with those who live just and right. Help me to align my life with Your will.

Donna Beck

Friday, March 2 Psalm 121

One of my absolute favorite ministers of music is Richard Smallwood. Richard Smallwood has written songs for our souls and music for our hearts. One of his most recognized tunes is “Total Praise.” “Total Praise” has been sung all across the world and translated into several languages. The opening lines of the song, “Lord I will lift my eyes to the hills knowing my help is coming from you,” comes from this very Psalm. The Psalmist writes this psalm out of a need to remind

himself and others that God is real. Also, this Psalmist tells us that God is the one who will supply all of the needs and protection that one could ask for.

Life can be challenging at times for many of us. We often look to things and people for help. We seek friends and family members. We look to television and books. We even look to self-destructive behaviors of various forms. However, none of these things and none of these people can send help like God can. And so today turn your eyes to the hills and mountains as it will cause you to look up. Look up! Your support comes from the Lord. It is in our prayer and devotional time that God directs us to which people and what things are going to be most beneficial in our times of need. It is important to seek God first. God has made all the heavens and the earth. God does not sleep on us, but yet God keeps watch on us at all times. God is the one who shall keep you and cover you all the days of your life.

Meditation:

What things and people do you look to for help? Have you been satisfied? What has been the outcome? Have you tried looking to God first? Why has this been the outcome? How did God direct you?

Prayer:

God, help us to trust You more. Help us to believe that we can look up and You will be there. Truthfully, God, You have always been there for us, but sometimes we have failed to acknowledge your presence. You, Oh God, are the one who hides us and shields us. You are the one that keeps us from stumbling. We ask that You continue to cover us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Rev. Williams

Saturday, March 3 Psalm 22

Reflection:

Can you feel it?

The kind of despair that digs trenches in your bones.

The kind of grief that eats holes in your heart.

The kind of pain that imprisons your soul.

We live in a world where turning on the news is an exercise in heartache.

Where so many of us—and if not us, then our families, our neighbors, our communities, our friends—seem to be crushed on every side.

Forsaken.
Forgotten.
Where are You, God?

The psalmist utters, whispers, screams at once our pain.
Animates our anguish. Gives voice to our emotion.
Why have you forsaken me? (v.1)

We realize,
We have been crying out to God for a very long time.

Where are you, God?
Why are you so far away?

... Poured out like water [...]
... my heart is like wax. (v.15)

It is one thing to feel absence, accidental.
It is another to feel the absence, the distance, the void, the loneliness, intentional.

Yet
The psalmist knows.
We serve a God we can run to.
First person, possessive.
My God. Your God. *Our God.*

A God who commands us to remember.
A God who gives us the gift of memory.
A God who knows we need to be reminded.

It is the kind of thing you can't impose on someone.
No one grieving, despairing, barely making it needs to be told that everything happens for a reason (it doesn't), that joy is coming in the morning (but maybe

not *tomorrow* morning), that they should "just" praise the Lord anyhow (as if God can't be present with us in our despair).

—No.

We stand together because we are meant to recall the good and the bad. We are meant to face even the darkest abyss, the longest nights of the soul, in the embrace of one another. We are called to be a community for those who seem greatest and least among us. To know that we are not the first, nor the last, and yet *our* God cares. Always has, always will. Even when we are yet waiting for a change to come.

Why have you forsaken me?
The question falls from Jesus' lips.
Words spoken by the Word.
The prayers of the people.

This is the right question to ask because we all need help to remember that God is an answer.

And isn't that the point?
Only in the asking, do we already make claim, that we are not forgotten.
Only in the asking, do we already speak our faith, that there is a God—our God—who hears.
Only in the asking, do we already believe, that God is merciful, just, and true.

So ask, already.
In a world that so quickly forgets,
We have a hope that needs to be remembered.

Meditation:
Are you keeping it real with God? With yourself? With your church family?
When is the last time you lamented before the Lord?
When is the last time you cried out about injustices?
When is the last time you reviewed God's archive of faithfulness in your life?
What are you doing to keep these memories alive in a dying world?

Prayer:

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be true and unafraid—whether raw with pain, wrought with uncertainty, weary with the world, or even exuberant with joy.

May we be faithful to acknowledge where we are, the questions we hold, the fears we harbor. Knowing You are the source of our strength, knowing You are large enough to hold it all.

May we let go of our need for easy answers and instead be inspired to be living solutions.

May we know that You call us, and all that we are, by name.

May we know our freedom before You bring us closer to freedom for all.

Dr. Amey Victoria Adkins-Jones

Lenten Program

February 25, 2018 — March 3, 2018

“Being Faithful Over a Few”



Matthew 25:23

²³His Lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

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