



Calvary Presbyterian Church
Sunday, February 18, 2024

Beloved Dust

Rev. Eyde Mabanglo

SCRIPTURE READINGS Mark 1:9-15

The Baptism of Jesus

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. ¹¹And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The Testing of Jesus

¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

MESSAGE

Last Sunday was Super Bowl Sunday, and as someone who studied television in both high school and college, I like to pay particular attention to the commercials. This year I was particularly drawn to the "he gets us" quote ads.

Apparently, these ads try to portray an authentic Jesus – that is a kind, benevolent, just Jesus. The organization behind these ads say that they want to portray an apolitical Jesus; however, I'm not sure that is possible, because an apolitical Jesus is not an authentic Jesus (in my opinion).

These commercials are good though. I liked the way they pictured Jesus washing the feet of so many different marginalized people...but when we start to name those who are in and those who are out, those who are deserving and those who need to be cast out, we are indeed making political judgements. We are fencing people out of God's love, and we need to de-fence our acceptance of others.

Jesus was very political. Those who cry out that the pulpit gets too political are the ones who simply don't like the way that the scriptures challenge their own politics. Jesus spoke to the dominant culture and said stop it. When his disciples sounded like the empire, he said stop it. When we find ourselves making judgements about others and putting people outside of our walls and our fences, we will find the Spirit of Christ saying, please, please stop.

Mending Wall

BY ROBERT FROST

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.*

*The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.*

*I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line*

*And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.*

*Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'*

*Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.*

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.*

*He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'*

The commercials from the Superbowl were targeted at those who have been critical or overtly dismissive of the church today – at least the way the church represents Jesus. They wanted to show the empathy of Jesus, the humanity of Jesus, the inclusion of Jesus. Again, I saw this and I like it...but there are voices from both the left and the right (who are good at their own fence building and wall maintenance). The left sees that the organization and the donors that support the ad campaign as those who are perpetuating exclusive politics and anti-inclusive efforts. The right sees the commercials as erroneous in saying that Jesus would wash the feet of anyone who was not already a devoted disciple.

So now everyone is offended...or at least skeptical. We have reached equality in our arrogance, elitism, and hard hearts.

Imagine a policeman washing a shoplifter's feet in one scene, would we bristle if it was a shoplifter washing the officer's toes? What is clear is that both the offender and the offended need to be reconciled...

Lent is a season of repentance, but what might that mean for us?

"Repentance" is not feeling miserable over our sins or regretting that we haven't been more religious. To repent (metanoein) is to turn our minds God-ward: a 180-degree swing-around from kingdoms of our own fabrication toward God's rectifying power (Mark 8:33). As Jesus demonstrates, God's power is propelled by mercy. That is good news: the best anyone could hope to hear. Lent is the season to ponder that.

SOURCE: WP, C. Clifton Black (2.18.18)

Of all the things that we might give up for Lent, I think that we might give up judging one another. Let us ask like Robert Frost:

*Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.*

In God's economy of neighborhoods or caste systems or positions of power don't we all need to be washed? As we are all dusty. And are we not all called to wash others as we are all dusty?

This is the economy of grace; this is the authentic Jesus. Whenever we draw a line in the dust, we find Jesus on the other side drawing in the dust too. Remember the woman brought to Jesus by the judging elders... Jesus stoops there before her, before us; this God of compassion, at eye level with us, disrupts our cosmos, disrupts our hearts, disrupts our Lent by saying you are forgiven...go, go not to build walls or better fences, but go and love as I love.

There is no great wall perhaps than the one between heaven and earth, and yet in Mark 1 we read about the inaugural ministry of Jesus with that wall being ripped open!

We hear the echoes of Isaiah 64:1

*Oh, that you would burst from the heavens and come down!
How the mountains would quake in your presence!*

This is a cosmic disruption – brushing away the dust or sand-blasting our hearts...

power-washing the dust, so that our souls might change.

Clouds tearing. Heavens ripping. Divine voice booming. Spirit descending.

(Brian Blount, Biblical Scholar)

*Jesus comes out of the baptismal waters. He comes with the gospel of God, points away from himself, trusting that the longing for God to break through the heavens means both change **for** us and change **with** us.*

SOURCE: WP, David Schnasa Jacobsen (2.18.24)

Calvary, I invite you to walk in the dust of the authentic rabbi and be covered with his wisdom, his truth, his love. Let us allow God to rip open the heavens and disrupt our assumptions and transform our hearts this Lent.

May it be so.

