

Is Lent too Difficult? Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Psalm 51: 1-12

Jeremiah is the go-to prophet for the season of Lent. And, the first round pick of Lenten Psalms will always be the fifty-first. Misery, mourning, weeping: this prophet has it all. Sin, wickedness, hyssop are found in this Psalm. These two passages of Holy Scripture are not usually on everyone's top five Biblical reading lists, to be sure.

Perhaps that's why we don't rush forward to the Lenten season as we do for the Advent Season. Week after week of sadness, sin and sorrow are hard to swallow. I prefer satin to sackcloth don't you? So many transgressions I discover. They are everywhere.

It's enough to shout, "Basta!" Enough! Then I slap my forehead and realize isn't this what Lent is supposed to do? This spiritual journey's purpose is to bring us to brutal honesty, repentance, and self-awareness. We call these weeks a 'season' for a reason: because it takes a while. Longer than we want and, like a boomerang, it always comes back. Like our sin. You and I have lived long enough to know that sin doesn't take a vacation when Easter gets here.

Evil never takes a sabbatical. And, Christian bookstores notwithstanding, genuine spiritual evaluation doesn't happen in a day or in ten simple steps. We cannot find Easter without being in solemn spiritual work, but not everyone is willing to pay the cost. We cannot find Easter without first finding repentance, but again, not everyone is willing to pay the price.

But that doesn't mean some of us won't try. We can't find resurrection without first encountering repentance, but that doesn't mean everyone is willing to make the effort.

We cannot encounter Easter without experiencing a personal dark night of the soul. But that doesn't mean everyone wants to. No, the Messiah did not side-step either the desert or the cross. So, in the middle of Lent we find we need a word from Jeremiah

and the mysterious ability of the fifty-first Psalm to speak what we are unable, or perhaps, unwilling to give voice.

Yet, a careful reading of both texts reveal more than gloom, doom and tears. In the midst of these hard words we note a transition to a different season. The prophet Jeremiah asks us to focus our eyes on the future and a new covenant of salvation. The psalmist also invites us to view a renewed joy and salvation.

Jeremiah and the Psalmist call us to a trinity of our needs: salvation, joy, and covenant. At this present moment will you join me in searching for this bright horizon? Could it be that we see a momentary preview of life after the stormy skies? A coming time when our petty-mindedness leaves us.

Do you see it? It's not easy to see at first. It is unfamiliar, counter-intuitive, Our eyes are still in Lent-mode, so we may need to focus harder to allow our minds and souls to open as never before. To risk, to be vulnerable.

The future is not at all like our past. Not at all. No broken promises, no failures, no being taken advantage of, no more being consumed by self-doubt, or plundered by pride. I am not understanding it if I still think that it is me doing everything or anything for my salvation.

No, what we are gazing at is different. Look at it again. Let your eyes adjust and you mind open further to God's future. God is the God of new beginnings with us. God refuses to give up on you. We who have considered ourselves beyond help, past fixing have been given new life. And even those who thought they didn't need repair have been given new life.

If you see broken relationships healed, you see it. If you see God forgiving all sin, you see it. Do you see a child forgive a parent? An employee forgiving a boss? A wife her husband? Do you see a church being open to a pain-filled, violent world? Then you see it. I understand that it is painful to gaze at Jesus on the cross, but don't look away, he does not.

As our vision returns to the present we have much to do before Resurrection Sunday. While it is attractive to move ahead to April 5th, let's stay with Lent a while

longer. If we do perhaps somewhere along the way we will discover that it is in grief and mourning that we meet our need for redemption. A lot can be experienced in forty days. You'll see.

The clouds of our current situation are rolling back in, and we have much left to do during this season. It's tempting to try to skip ahead in this redemptive journey, but if we resist that temptation, maybe, just maybe, somewhere along the way it will dawn on us that it is only in the midst of mourning and hyssop that we encounter our need for redemption ... that we experience redemption. A lot can happen in forty days. Just wait, you'll see.

Alleluia. Amen

