Lent 5 Year B 03/18/18

Wilson & Burt

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# Change

**The Collect**

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, **among the swift and varied changes of the world,** our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.*Amen.*

**Old Testament - Jeremiah 31:31-34**

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

**Psalm 119:9-16**

9 How shall a young man cleanse his way? \* By keeping to your words.

10 With my whole heart I seek you; \*let me not stray from your commandments.

11 I treasure your promise in my heart, \*that I may not sin against you.

12 Blessed are you, O Lord; \*instruct me in your statutes.

13 With my lips will I recite \*all the judgments of your mouth.

14 I have taken greater delight in the way of your decrees \*than in all manner of riches.

15 I will meditate on your commandments \*and give attention to your ways.

16 My delight is in your statutes; \*I will not forget your word.

**The Epistle - Hebrews 5:5-10**

Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

**The Gospel -John 12:20-33**

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

The Collect today:

Sometimes lays out the theme, if you will, for the day. Collects have a standard form: Start with to whom we are praying, in this case “Almighty God”, then a specific attribute, “you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners”. Then the issue being addressed: “Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, **among the swift and varied changes of the world,** our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found”.

Then it finishes off with a pretty standard appellation that we are empowered to pray though Christ, as we were told by Jesus that whatever we pray for in his name will be heard.

“you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners” – First, I feel compelled to say, this being Lent, that sinners mean all of us. We are not bad people trying to be good, we are people with brokenness, looking for healing. The original sense of the word "sin", is failure, being in error, missing the mark, especially in spear throwing.  Hebrew *hata* "sin" originates in archery and literally refers to missing the "gold" at the centre of a target, but hitting the target, i.e. error. (Wikipedia.org). We cannot fix ourselves by our own efforts, we cannot hit the mark alone.

The collect then says “**among the swift and varied changes of the world,** our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found”. Swift and varied changes of the world.

When I was young, I loved change, I loved the excitement of it and was always looking for something new and different. I have however, learned to value traditions and routine. When starting my day, I follow the same routine, I don’t have to think about it and that is a good thing as I’m usually half asleep. I shower, shave, dress all in the same order pretty much every day.

When I drive to work I take the same route, when I go to church I sit in the same seat. Routines are helpful but …. They can also be a hindrance. When things do change up I can find myself in turmoil. What do you mean, that road is closed? I have had to learn different ways to communicate. It has gone from letters to email.

From phone calls to texts and while I’d love to tell you that I’m all over the changes, I have to admit that I still struggle with it. I now start with text, then move to email or phone. My daughter won’t answer the phone unless I text her first saying that I’d like to talk to her!

How about what we do here on Sunday mornings? I can find myself struggling whenever something is changed. Are there any of you here that remember the turmoil over the new prayer book in 1979? I remember when we first started sharing the peace. What do you mean we move and speak during the service?

I certainly need the Grace of God to help me with the varied and swift changes in this world.

Have you ever gone to church and after leaving can’t remember a thing that was said? It has happened to me. I’ll go to brunch afterward and don’t remember the Gospel or anything. Some days, it’s like getting dressed in the morning, I’m just going through the routine.

I suppose that seeing as how I’m up where with a collar on, I shouldn’t admit to this but I’d bet that some of you have done this too. I’ve learned trick to help me stay focused in church; one of them is to listen for the theme, often presented in the opening collect.

When I am able to really pay attention to the words and not just let them roll over me because we say them every week, I’m often struck by how meaningful they are.

There isn’t a single thing in our service today that hasn’t been thought about, that hasn’t been intentionally put into the service.

Amid the swift and varied changes of the world, it is comforting to have this time of stability, but….

Why are we here if not to have God shape us? We have admitted that we are sinners, that we miss the mark. While we have heard these Gospels before, are we all set? God came to be with us in the form of Jesus so that we will be changed. In the second reading we heard

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered”.

Jesus gets it, our dilemma; therefor God gets it. We are not alone, we need the Grace of God to be with us. Where is this God understanding to be found? It’s not about an external god, one that sits on a throne somewhere and watches us.

The **first reading** gives us an insight. We are told about the new covenant, “the Lord [said]: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord”.

“I will put my law within them.” We have within us the love of the Lord, the law; if we listen, we can hear what the Lord would have us do. What gets in the way, among other things, is our falling into routine and not listening. Lord give us Grace to keep our minds and hearts fixed on where the true joys are to be found.

In the **Psalm** we said “I treasure your promise **in my heart**, \*that I may not sin against you.” Let these readings speak to that place in your heart, that is where the promise lives.

There is something quite important in the words of Jesus this morning. We heard “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life”. Let’s unpack this a little bit. “those who love their life lose it”, if we hang on tightly to what we have, it will lose its value. Like going to Church every week and just doing things by wrote. Like doing the same thing over and over and being surprised that we don’t get more joy in our lives. Change isn’t an easy thing, it’s uncomfortable but if we want to have more joy in our lives, we have to be willing to change.

Jesus tells us that those who “hate this life in this world” will find everlasting life. Hate in this context is not based on an emotional context, rather is means to reject or turn away from. We are being told to turn away from our sins; remember? Those places and things where we miss the mark. Another way to say that is that we have to be willing to let go of those sins, those things that cause us to stay in “the world”, in our lives of self-serving contentment. We need to be like that grain of wheat. If we die to ourselves we can find that place of joy. “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also”. If we serve God from that place within we will be with Jesus and God will honor us. Eternal life isn’t just about what happens after death, it speaks of life here and now. Jesus said that the kingdom has come, he is talking about the resurrection, here in this place, here within each of us.

We are part of the new covenant, that one where “they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest”.

We don’t earn this, it comes by Grace and fellowship in the community of Christ. If, we are willing, the Grace of God can and will transform us. Our part is to be willing to be changed. As we move toward Holy week, I encourage you to listen to the words being said, to let that transforming power of Christ come out from within and transform us into the body of Christ.

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, **among the swift and varied changes of the world,** our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.*Amen.*