

First Sunday of Lent
Feb. 29 & Mar. 1, 2020

All Saints Parish, Syr.
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The Words of Jesus

When we first opened Francis House, I had to find a dining room table and chair set but we had very little money at the time. A friend who works with fire and flood insurance told me of a place that had a table and chair set that had been in a flood. We accepted it. I was told just to paint it over and it would look like brand new, covering up all the water stains. Since my father dabbled in wood working, I have a great appreciation for the beauty of wood. I found a volunteer who was willing to strip the table and chairs, varnish and finish them. Almost 30 years later, the set looks like new. The table brings beauty to our home; life to those who sit around it; and is warm and welcoming in its natural state. I am grateful we did not choose the way of cover up.

Today's reading from Genesis presents us again with our creation story. We are told that in the beginning it was good but then it got worse! We hear how it all went wrong. It was blissful, the man and woman knew happiness together, no shame, living in harmony with nature. It was the age of innocence and peace with God, but it did not last. In eating the forbidden fruit, they disobeyed God, it all fell apart. They hid parts of themselves from each other and the whole of themselves from God. Cover up becomes the new way of relating to God and each other.

The effect of sin is dislocation everywhere and everything becomes askew. Nothing is as it was planned to be. We can no longer be open with God or each other. We can't face God. It is the first question in the Bible: "Where are you?" says God. Salvation is about being found by God..."Where are you?"

So in our creation myth, Adam and Eve are the first refugees, exiled. Banished from the garden they have to make do in a world of struggled for survival; where human relationships are fragile; a world where fidelity to God's word will always be a challenge.

Our nation is in crisis, demoralized, devalued, division, dissecting. We need to reconnect to the teachings and person of Jesus, to rediscover, return to, reclaim who we are, like that table I spoke of. Jesus is that hope for bringing us back to our origins. He is the way of life. He comes looking for those who have hidden themselves from God. "I have come to seek out the lost." Jesus comes seeking us out in the moment of national crises. Jesus is the quest of God in search of a lost people. Jesus, before he begins his mission to bring all the lost home, begins in the desert, a wasteland, tempted by the perennial falsehoods of power, wealth, prestige. What do we learn from Jesus in these temptations?

We live in a "spirit of fear"; people doubt the existence of truth. What can we learn from Jesus? More than any other phrase, Jesus said: "Do not fear."

When it's about power and leadership, winning or losing, Jesus says it's about service, washing another's' feet.

When accusation and slander and attack become the norms of discourse, Jesus says those who are the peacemakers, the conflict resolvers, are the "children of God."

When strong powerful people say it is all about them, give to Caesar the limited amount that belongs to Caesar and to God everything else.

The ultimate measure of our lives is what we have done for the "least of these."

Traditionally time to give up something is Lent, but can we allow ourselves to take on something: the Words of Jesus. The Word brings us to the kind of person we committed ourselves to be. Let the Word form us as it did Jesus. Let it influence what we say and do. Let the Word find us so we can emerge from our hiding places into the Kingdom.

Jesus does not become lost as did Adam and Eve. He clings to the Word of God. He lives by the Word of God, feeds on it, obedient to it.

In the weeks from now to Pentecost, the way to find out the answer to "Where are you?" is to cling to the Words of Jesus.