

Lent II Year A 2014

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

You no doubt have seen those mostly ridiculous Geico ads on television. It is apparent that whoever is writing the copy for these ads are smoking something illegal! Or at least only legal in two states... I usually just mute the TV when they come on, but there is one that strikes me as hilarious... It begins with a boy's father telling his son ... “Did you know that Pinocchio was a terrible liar?” And then the scene switches to a meeting in the eternal hotel meeting room in which Pinocchio is cast as a motivational speaker... He tells the hapless participants, “I see so much untapped potential in this room.... You sir, he says... speaking to a man sitting by himself... cheap polyester suit, a little overweight.. and a decided comb-over... you sir... you are full of potential...the man brightens... and as he says those words, his nose begins to grow... and as his nose grows, the man becomes more and more dejected... don't know what that has to do with car insurance, but it's funny.

And what makes it funny, I think, is the fact that all of us to some extent doubt our worthiness... doubt our potential... doubt that we are loved... how could we be loved when we are not good enough? Our culture in fact affirms such self deprecation... We are taught since birth that we are not good enough...not smart enough, not tall enough, not rich enough, not successful enough, not thin enough, on and on. And we pass that self critical impairment on to our children... It is a vicious cycle of self loathing that has far reaching ramifications in our society...and in our world.... It stops us; drains us of confidence and energy... It convinces us that we are best unseen.

Today we read from the Gospel of John, a gospel which is passionate in its argument that we humans are not only worthy... but that we are made of the same stuff as God... Jesus of course the archetype of who we are in truth... rendering the age old notion that Jesus is somehow unique from us, a blatant heresy... Jesus is the type, the model, the mythological figure, if you will... a figure emblematic of who we are... The scribes of this gospel are making passionately the claim that to be human is to be divine, god-like, participating in the very act of creation.

We are told in the prologue of this gospel that the word, the truth of the universe from the very beginning, the very light of God is one and the same as the light of humankind... This is not my paraphrase... It is right

there... and the remainder of this gospel is pleading with us to own our divinity, our God-likeness... which is to own the fact that we are loved by God and more importantly, like God, we are made to love others.... That's it! ... That divinity is not in the least super nature, wholly other, as Karl Barth puts it... but divinity is quite simply and profoundly, the capacity to love. It is what we are born for... To love as God loves.... It is our nature... Bearing mercy and compassion, and justice and dignity... It is our nature to be about the business of setting things right... being the means of salvation no less... That is our vocation... that is the only reason we exist.... That is what love is... love, the active reality in our world that engenders worth, dignity and freedom... and we, as friends of God, are the means of it.

In our gospel reading today we encounter Nicodemus, a scholar, teacher, a member of the establishment... a good man... He's got it all right in his head, but there's more to it than that... Our intellect may serve us well, but ultimately this so-called life in Christ is all about right acting... not right thinking... believing in John's gospel is not just about thinking right... but believing into a way of life... In fact the word for belief in the Koine Greek is best translated, "trust into"... It is an active verb... believing is acting... acting for the good... believing then is a way of life into which we are all called as humans... and acting for the good is nothing short of divine... so, again, believing that Jesus is somehow apart from us... unique from us, I believe is a most convenient and insidious way to abdicate our responsibility to love, to be about setting things right... being the love of God in the world. Jesus tells us in this gospel that we are to do greater things than he... that not unlike him... we are the world's nurture.

This dear friends is no lie... It is our true story... Jesus in the lore of these scribes is telling us the truth... he tells this from experience... he speaks for a movement that has seen with its own eyes the truth... that our loving... our bearing the God-light... will change the world... set things right... bring God's gracious order to our world.... Will bring worth, dignity, well being and freedom... freedom from what enslaves.... That is resurrection life... life that we bear as anointed lovers of the world... resurrection, not a projected utopian future, but resurrection a profound life affirming truth now... in the present day... in every present moment... It is for us to believe into this way.

This passage... the conversation with Nicodemus, is a critical one in John's gospel. The very crux of the matter, as it were... In possibly one of the most famous sound bites of scripture we are told the truth... "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life... Over the centuries we have

been taught that this passage was about this unique God-man Jesus, and his saving each individual soul... all we have to do is believe... but this passage is classic Hebrew doctrine... the Son of God is not an individual but the people of Israel... “Out of Egypt I have called my son”, you remember from Hosea, quoted by Matthew in his gospel narrative.” God has sent God’s people to redeem the world... God has sent God’s sons and daughters... that’s consistent with the 17th chapter of Genesis... that the people of Israel are given as a light to the world... for the world’s salvation... God gives Jesus only to the extent that we are given as well... Jesus, the archetype for a people called to love and therefore called to change the world... We dare not hide our light... we dare not abdicate our godlikeness... lest the world languish in the dark... This is incarnation: God’s love enfleshed in those whom God loves... God so loved the world, that God gave his people, not to condemn it... but to save it.

As God’s sons and daughters we are called, we are made to live into our second life... This passage is about living into our second life... being born anew we are told... being born anew an essential part of the human journey... Our first life, our literal birth, is simply to survive, to live for ourselves, out of necessity... But our second life (our baptisms the outward and visible sign thereof) Our second life is to live for our world... If we are in touch with the transience and mutability of this life, then living for the other is the only purpose that makes sense.

Brothers and sisters we carry God’s DNA... we are the stuff of the beginnings, the stuff of light and truth... the stuff of the stars... We are born with the capacity to love... How awesome is that?... nothing else matters... our hopes, our dreams, our successes, our failures... nothing else matters except that God loves us: We are God’s beloved sons and daughters, worthy of the abundant life that is life in God... abundant life begotten of our loving our neighbor... And being loved we are made for love, to love as God loves, no less... and if we dare to believe into, to live into such a life... we will experience, we will discover what love is, what life is... love, a life without fear, a life full of possibility and hope and meaning and purpose. That is the truth... and the truth will set us free.

Look inside dear ones... Look deep inside and know that you are loved... Look inside and know that you are quite enough... and then with all due courage, claim your second life... Let yourself, your God-light, be seen... Give your life away for the many so that they will be convinced... convinced that they are loved as well, convinced that they are enough... Why would we act otherwise?