

FAMILY... I could probably stop there and just sit down.

Somehow, especially since the Great Depression, we have believed both that we were in charge of our own success; and that Every Generation should be better off than the one before. We have greater technology, we have greater alternatives, but I am uncertain we are really any better. Throughout the last 70 years, a new Theory has been popular in Psychology and in the Church, called Family Systems, we have mentioned this before. The crux of the idea, is that CHANGE CAN BE FRIGHTENING. If your parents never left a place, you will probably stay in the same location. If your parent was a Police Officer, you have a tendency to do so. If in your family were Pastors, you are inclined to attend Church and become a leader. If your parent was Alcoholic, there are behaviors and broken relationships that it is really really hard to do anything different, which is why someone in recovery often says I have been in Recovery for 10-20-30 and more years. What we look for in Family Systems Theory are REPEATED BEHAVIORS. We have had a Kirk'n of Tartans for the last 3 years, in expectation this will continue. Someone phoned me yesterday verifying if our Worship is still at 11am, even though our Worship has been at 9:30am for several years, but their behavior went back to when we had multiple services with one at 11.

Last time, we read GOD's prophecy through the Prophet Nathan, that because David had scorned the Word of GOD, killing Uriah with the Sword, taking Uriah's wife, a Sword would never depart David's family. The Soap-Opera that became King David's life was that David's son Amnon, fell in love with his half-sister Tamar. Amnon was so hopelessly in love, he feigned being ill. He then told David the only thing that would make him feel better would be if Tamar came and cooked food for him and feed him from her own hand! Tamar did as her father instructed her, bringing the makings of bread, which she kneaded and cooked for him at Amnon's house. Next Amnon demanded she bring the food to his bed, where he attacked his sister. She pled with him not to shame her, at the least to ask the King first to marry them. But Amnon raped his sister; then was disgusted with her, because of what he had done to her. Tamar put ashes on her face, to atone for her shame, and when her full brother Absalom saw it, Absalom surmised what Amnon had done. Now, it should be said that Absalom was a beautiful man, without blemish, who had luxurious thick, long black hair. Every few years Absalom would cut his hair, and it would weigh 200 shekels, that is 5 lbs. Absalom brooded over what Amnon had done for 2 years, then Absalom killed Amnon.

As this saga continues, Absalom divides the loyalties of Israel, until there was another Civil War, now between Absalom and David. Having already lost Bathsheba's first baby, then Amnon, King David instructed his soldiers that if they can capture Absalom, to NOT KILL HIM, because who has the right to Kill the SON OF THE ANOINTED KING. As they pursued Absalom riding upon a Mule, his hair became caught in the branches of Oak Trees in the forest, with the mule rode out from under him. Absalom was left suspended between heaven and earth. I had a professor in Seminary who used to remind us, when you have the SON OF THE KING, a man without Blemish, suspended between Heaven and Earth by a tree, and QUESTION: Who has authority to kill the Son of the King, All this becomes foreshadowing for what would happen to the Messiah. Routinely, we consider Jesus' knowing of his coming death, his passion, and human guilt and sorrow; this story elevates the agony of GOD. Also, that as the death of Absalom was not an isolated incident, this culminated all the calamities of David's family, so Jesus' death was not an isolated incident, the death of a Rabbi, a Messiah... Jesus' death is because of all humanity's scorn of GOD's Love. "O Absalom, my Son, my Son." O Sacred head now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down. The point is not to assign BLAME, or to assume we have no choices in life! But if we are to live differently, we must choose differently!

We regularly follow the Roman Catholic Lectionary, which included the story of Absalom for today, there is also an Episcopal Lectionary with the same Gospel, which instead recommended the story of Elijah, we used as our Call to Worship.

Most of us know the story from a hundred years after David, when Ahab was King with his Jezebel, who worshipped the Idol Baal. Elijah called for a contest between Baal and GOD, between all 450 of the Prophets of Baal versus Elijah each making a sacrifice of a Bull. For the Prophets of Baal nothing happens in response to all their prayers, their sacrifices, their beating themselves up; whereas Elijah prays to GOD and a lightning bolt consumes the whole offering. We also know the story that comes after, of Elijah in the Cave with the Still Small Voice asking "What are you doing here Elijah?"

In between these two classic stories, Elijah responds to the Contest of Sacrifices by ruthlessly killing all 450 of the Prophets of Baal then running into the desert in fear. Elijah runs until he can run no more and crashes exhausted. An angel appears repeatedly providing him bread and water and rest for his journey. And finally what he has done comes to Elijah and the Prophet cries out I am No better than our Ancestors.

Even in this modern world of Computerization, Information and Rationalization, we recognize symbols. One of our staff mentioned she was late because she had to see the Vampires. What she meant was she had to have Blood Drawn. We see a RED Light and we Stop. We see a Jack-o-lantern and we think of Halloween. An evergreen tree with lights and we think of Christmas. Some Sunday in August if our Hymns were O Come, O Come Emmanuel and Silent Night, Holy Night many of you would wonder about the Pastor needing a vacation. When we see Bread and Wine at the Table, after 2000 years we know that Jesus is the Bread of Life. But here, the crowds looked at Jesus knowing full well that he had grown up with them in Nazareth, with a father who was a Carpenter and a Mother who was Mary... What did he mean that he had COME FROM HEAVEN? Or that we needed to eat his flesh?

Our problem is the reverse! Not that we do not understand who Jesus is, or what he meant.

Our problem is that we take what we know for granted, believing that everything in the world would be perfect if everyone do what we tell them to do, if everyone believed as we do.

King David took GOD for granted, took being King for granted, so he took Uriah's wife and killed Uriah.

Amnon raped his sister because he wanted her, then was repulsed because of what he had done to her.

Absalom brooded over killing his brother Amnon, regardless of the effects on the World.

Elijah had already proven that Baal was powerless and GOD was REAL, yet Elijah killed all those who challenged him, when they had not challenged Elijah they challenged belief in GOD.

Jesus message was not about eating BREAD & WINE as a Sacrament!

He named that for 40 years, the people of Israel had Bread from Heaven, yet they died!

Communion is about more than the eating of bread or flesh, the drinking of Grape Juice or Blood!

COMMUNION is TAKING IN the broken behaviors and relationships in our lives, how broken our World!

AND TRUSTING that GOD does not leave us condemned!

GOD offers us the GRACE of being able to CHOOSE DIFFERENTLY.

Being able to make a difference in the lives of others.

We Are NO BETTER than OUR ANCESTORS,

but receiving CHRIST has given us ability to be different than we have been, to live lives that will matter for all Eternity.