



December 29, 2019

Reconciliation for the Sins of the People

Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey

True Confession: This morning I tried to Chicken Out. Christmas Eve we sang all the Carols, we told the story of the birth of the Savior, we sang Silent Night by Candle Light, Christmas Morning was bright and beautiful with a hint of moisture in the Desert and the Tree aglow, we talked to family and watched Christmas Movies and ate far too much, sharing fellowship with new friends. WHEN On the First Sunday of Christmas, recognizing the relationship of depression and Holidays, recognizing Christ comes because of the sins of the world, the Common Lectionary tells us to read and preach on the Holy Family's Escape to Egypt because of the Genocide of Innocence. Perhaps I am still caught up in our Honeymoon together but this is Too Much Reality, Too Soon! In the week between Christmas and New Year's, we want to lounge in our PJs, eating cookies, listening to Bing Crosby and Mariah Carey. So exercising my Free Will and Authority as Preacher I said, the Lectionary gives us an Old Testament, a Psalm, a Gospel and a Letter, LET'S READ HEBREWS instead!

Except there is a great deal we do not know about Hebrews... We do not know exactly who it was written to, like Corinthians was written to the Church at Corinth, or Romans to the Church at Rome... We do not know when it was written, or by whom...

What we do know, is Hebrews is a Sermon, to people who know and remember their Hebrew Bible, i.e. All inheritors for the Old Testament, we Gentile Christians are the Hebrews; and the author's message is that everything in the Old Testament (Kings, Priests, Sacrifices) not only are present in Jesus Christ, but being Emmanuel: God in Humanity, he is our Perfect Example, the PIONEER & PERFECTOR of the Faith.

The point of the Letter to the Hebrews then is that we make connections of the Old Testament to the Gospels, and how Jesus is "the Perfect Example" of the Hebrew Bible reference.

1. Isaiah prophesies that a Virgin/ a young girl shall conceive and bear a child calling him?
2. After Jesus was born, his father HAD A DREAM. In the Old Testament are there any stories about someone who had DREAMS or INTERPRETTED DREAMS? And their name was? _____
3. In a time of Starving to Death, Israel became Illegal Alien Refugees in Egypt to save them from Death.
4. While in Egypt the family of Joseph grew larger and grew stronger, and Jesus grew in strength and wisdom.
5. According to Exodus, PHAROAH attempted to kill all the Baby boys. And King Herod also attempted to kill all the babies in Bethlehem, so Herod is this generation's Pharaoh.

In the Old Testament, we start with Abram and Sarai. And they were from where? UR of Chaldea searching for the place God would show them. Generations later, the Best loved King of Israel was? David, but David had a terrible Family life, and the one to inherit his Throne was his youngest Son Solomon. King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba had Twin sons Reheboam and Jeroboam. To keep them from fighting after his death, in his Wisdom Solomon divided the Monarchy into Israel in the North and the Nation of Judah in the South. Meanwhile, the Nation of Chaldea where Abram and Sarai came from divided into Assyria and Babylon. Assyria attacked the Nation of Israel, and what happens to Israel? The

clue to many Crossword Puzzles: we do not know, they are the LOST 10 Tribes of Israel. Then over the next 70 years Babylon attacked Judah and carried them off to Babylonian Exile. After 70 years in Exile, The Babylonian Empire was attacked by the Persians. The Persians looked upon the Babylonians and the Israelites, recognizing both as genetically being Chaldeans. The Persians were conquered by the Medes, who were conquered by the Greeks, conquered by the Romans, each of whom treated Judah as a Puppet Kingdom, with their ancestral Kings and Priests, but all real Power was in foreign governments.

There is also a powerful connection/comparison here in the family of Jewish Kings and Emperors of Rome versus the Holy Family. "King Herod the Great" was not a Great King, he was a Puppet King of the Roman Empire. He was Called Herod the Great because he undertook "Six great building programs". Israel had settled on a cliff of the Mountain, and Herod decided Israel would have more room if the top of the mountain were removed down to the level of the Plateau. Meanwhile, he wanted the Roman Empire to be able to bring their Roman Slave Ships and Galleons into Harbor, but the Bay was too shallow, so King Herod used the Spoils from the excavation, at Duvall Mine they are called "Tailings" to fill the Harbor out to deep water to create a Roman Port... So when Jesus described "If you had faith the size of a Mustard Seed you could move this mountain into the Sea", he was describing something they HAD seen in their lifetimes, but done by forced slave labor instead of by faith in God. Herod's family were known for fear and quests for power, that involved killing their Fathers, their Mothers, their Husbands, Killing their Brothers, Killing Children; and this in the time of Julius Caesar, Augustus and Caligula of Rome. In Contrast you have the Virgin Mary, the Carpenter Joseph and the Baby Jesus, as Illegal Alien Refugees living in a foreign country trying to escape persecution and killing.

The Letter to the Hebrews explains that while Israel and the world, have had Kings and Priests, these have always been human beings, who were fallible. Jesus Christ is "Emmanuel", God and Humanity together, so able to serve as True King and True Priest. But even more, according to Orthodox religions, we repeatedly sin; therefore in Catholicism there was the Confessional, in Judaism making regular sacrifices. But in addition to being True King and True Priest, Jesus was also the perfect Sacrifice, who paid the price for Sin with a Capital S for all time, with no need for Repetition or Ratification by another. Presbyterians do not have a list of SINS. Instead, anything/everything that causes you shame, that you Hide from God the world and yourself, those are sins. The dilemma being what you find shame in, I may not. YET, Sin with a Capital S refers to our desire to satisfy ourselves without concern for others or God.

Knowing the Love of Valley Church for "RECONCILIATION", Jesus was the Reconciliation for Human Sin. The Point of this being, how many of us have felt as though WE HAD TO BE PERFECT? Our Mothers and Fathers, would not be proud of us if we disappointed them and we were not perfect. Our Bosses and Supervisors, our Children, our Home Owners Associations would hold it against us if we made a mistake? As those who trust in Jesus Christ, we know we do not have to be perfect because he is the RECONCILIATION of our Sins. There can be Forgiveness.

But having spoken of Herod's killing of the Innocents, as the Holy Family escaped to Egypt, even this morning when I did not want to do so; there is the hardest question of Faith...

Trusting that God is GOOD, All Knowing, All Powerful and Eternal, Did God cause the deaths of all those children by King Herod? Even if God did not Cause this, Surely God knew it was going to happen! Why Did God NOT Stop Herod? Why did God NOT stop the Genocide of the Holocaust?

This is the struggle of Free Will. God created humanity to love God. HOWEVER, love is meaningless if you try to force others to love you; so God gifted Humanity: Free Will. EXCEPT, whenever given a choice

between helping others and acting for our own benefit, People put their own Oxygen Mask on first, then attempt to help others. Could God have stopped the slaughter of Innocent children in Bethlehem? YES. Could God have prevented or stopped the Genocide of 6 Million Jews in the Holocaust? Yes. Did God know in advance and Could God have prevented September 11th? Yes. But this would have violated our Free Will. So how important is Free Will? Is that not a part of the question of September 11th and the Taliban? The Nazi Holocaust of Judaism and Eastern Europe? Of Herod killing the Innocent Babes and Pharaoh killing the children? God did not interfere to stop us, but I have to believe God did weep and mourn. AND God cared so deeply as to gift us with Jesus Christ, who would know as a human being what this agony is, and would serve as the RECONCILIATION for THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE.