

15 years ago, my friend Phyllis Tickle, an Episcopalian, who was Religion Editor for Harpers' Bazaar, published a book called The Great Emergence, stating her belief that every 500 years, Christianity brings out all of their old Heresies and controversies, LIKE A GREAT PATIO SALE, to re-examine and determine if there is anything of value. Her premise was important as 500 years ago was the Reformation, and 500 years before that was the GREAT SCHISM between EASTERN ORTHODOXY and ROMAN CATHOLICISM, and 500 years before that POPE GREGORY the GREAT led the Church into the DARK AGES. The problem was that she then went on to explain a division in the Presbyterian Church, which as an Anglican she got wrong. The difficulty is that when we disagree, when there are divisions, how can we RECONCILE?

Relationships are complicated. Siblings, neighbors, friends, partners, In-laws, Parenting, Grandparenting, and then there is Church! In conversations, quarrels, controversies, we seek "Easy Reconciliation", yet Reconciliation is never easy. And we are kidding ourselves if we imagine that RECONCILIATION WITH GOD is any different. I am perpetually in awe that this Church, our Church, chose as our Mission Statement in the midst of our most conflicted time: "To make Christ known through Reconciliation." I say perpetually, because like layers of skin, or skin of an Onion, there is reconciliation, there is Reconciliation & RECONCILIATION.

We want simple relationship with GOD. When there are complications in our lives, we PRAY taking GOD for granted. DEAR GOD, Fix it! When we are unhappy with our lives, we wonder about alternatives.

What else can give me what I need, what can make me happy? What will satisfy my needs?

Who else can answer my demands to see with clarity, especially when my soul is troubled, when I feel like I am losing myself, my purpose, my life? Who else, other than GOD can I use to see and be seen for myself?

Reconciliation of our Relationship with GOD is at the heart of both our Readings this day. The 10 Commandments were less about LAW or DEMANDS and more about DEFINING RELATIONSHIPS: Ours with GOD, GOD's with Jesus, Jesus with us and with Strangers. Because all the World, all of life is about to get complicated. Really Complicated, and Really, really hard, in each of these stories and in our world today.

After Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Ancient Israel was falling apart. After generations of falling away from GOD, seeking other religions, economic, social upheaval, political messes; there came violent invasions from Assyria where whole peoples were disappeared; followed by attacks from Babylon where the King's Palace and GOD's Temple went from disrepair to desecration to being destroyed. The Prophet Jeremiah is known for Doom & Gloom. When the other political party was prophesying avoidance of reality, Jeremiah did the hard work of Prophesying faith and reason. Finally, as the King was led away in chains, after complete loss, Jeremiah here prophesies HOPE IN THE FUTURE, "The Day of the Lord is Coming..." You cannot force reconciliation before its time, before both parties are ready to reconcile.

The difficulty of this prophecy, is that Jeremiah is not saying Everyone needs to return to Orthodoxy, if you will all just go back to following the Commandments, GOD will forgive and everything will be great: NO. Instead, Speaking through Jeremiah, GOD is declaring that the OLD COVENANT of MOSES is broken, just as if the Stone Tablets were broken again as at the Golden Calf. Instead GOD is going to write the COVENANT ANEW, but this time instead of being written in stone, the COVENANT will be written in every person's heart, this will be a living Covenant, Growing with our relationship with GOD. There will be no need for Preaching and Teaching, because every person will have this relationship in their hearts.

This NEW COVENANT differs from the Old Covenant in many ways but most significantly that it is brought into existence, ratified, NOT by any Sacrifice for our sins; INSTEAD completely by GOD's Decision to FORGIVE, to have amnesia regarding Israel's sinfulness, betrayal, infidelity. GOD does not just Pass Over,

Absolve, or Forget this time around...God erases even Memory of the Breach in their relationship, saying *"For I will forgive their iniquity, I will remember their sin no more."*

I want you to try an exercise regarding GOD's insistence not just to forget but to forgive our sins for the sake of a better relationship. Call to mind and hold one particular memory you wish GOD would forgive, an unkind word or action you are ashamed of. In the other hand hold on to one thing you wish YOU could forgive; some betrayal or disappointment that preys upon your heart. Do you have the 2, one for GOD to forgive, one for you to forgive. Now close your eyes and listen to the words of Jeremiah 31 again. Open your hand knowing that GOD intentionally chooses to forgive this, indeed GOD already has done so. Our difficulty is in the other hand. Some hurts have wounded us so deeply that they seem impossible to forget, and no one is a failure if they cannot let go the past. No one can make you forgive that offense, but possibly by GOD's grace written in your heart, from choosing to forgive us, we could intentionally choose to no longer be held captive. Because GOD is able to do what we might not be ready to do, to forgive all that keeps us from relationship with GOD, to be RECONCILED so that we can imagine living into a new future.

After RAISING LAZARUS from the dead, after the dinner where MARY ANOINTED Jesus with Oil, after the TRIUMPHAL ENTRY into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday// before the LAST SUPPER, before the ARREST and BETRAYALS, before the CRUCIFIXION// some GREEKS find Phillip and Andrew, 2 of the 4 Fishermen, whose names are Greek, and who come from the Greek Galilean fishing town of Bethsaida, saying "WE WOULD SEE JESUS". This is long before Peter's Dream of the White Sheet with Kosher and NonKosher and a Voice from Heaven declaring "WHAT GOD HAS DECLARED CLEAN YOU SHALL NOT CALL UNCLEAN!" Long before Paul's Conversion experience on the Damascus Road. At this time Jews and Gentiles did not associate, it was against the Laws of Leviticus for a Jew to go to the home of a Gentile; yet, reminiscent of Nicodemus, having heard about this man, they come wanting to SEE JESUS.

Like Nicodemus, Jesus' words of response are far more than these seekers imagined. Because to See Jesus, to really SEE JESUS, is to develop a relationship with his purpose and identity. Remember back to Advent Christmas, that Jesus is EMMANUEL, GOD & HUMANITY as ONE. That means not only GOD became HUMAN, to experience everything that it is to be Human, this UNION means that GOD is RECONCILING something vitally important in DEATH. For John's Gospel the Crucifixion is not about SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT, this is not dying for our individual sins, instead DEATH is a COSMIC BROKEN RELATIONSHIP begun at the Garden of Eden. When in Genesis GOD created every Plant, Tree, Fish and Bird, Creeping and Crawling thing, there was a phrase said for each that they were YIELDING SEED AFTER THEIR OWN KIND. GOD created Humanity in GOD's OWN IMAGE In the Image of GOD created ADAM, Male & Female created them...AND there was no mention of Seed of their kind in them! We were created to be Companions of GOD, Caretakers of the Earth. When Adam & Eve ate of the TREE they were told to NOT Eat, they were put out of the Garden, knowing DEATH & HARDSHIP as being Separate from GOD. Jesus' Crucifixion is about the DEATH of everything HUMAN/everything MORTAL in him, that GOD CAN FORGIVE & REMEMBER OUR SINS NO MORE, to truly RECONCILE the Brokenness of Sin.

My favorite part of the WIZARD OF OZ is after the Wicked Witch is dead and after the Wizard has been found out, when he bestows on the SCARECROW a Diploma as proof of his Brain; a Medal to the LION for COURAGE; and a HEART to the TIN MAN, telling him how lucky he had been previously to not have a Heart that could get broken. This week with PATIO SALE, I found and purchased a HEART for STEW BEAR, to remind us all that our mission is the MAKE CHRIST KNOWN THROUGH RECONCILIATION. LOVE & FORGIVENESS.