

# FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT | SERMON

Joshua 5:9-12; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 | The Rev. Barnabas Pusnur | St. Paul & the Redeemer | March 27, 2022

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This Sunday's lessons stumped me. I struggled to see how the Old Testament, New Testament, & the Gospel for today connected to each other in any way. The Israelites kept the Passover at Gilgal. Paul declared that to be in Christ is to be a new creation. And Jesus told a parable of a son who squanders everything and then returns to his father. How are these lessons connected? As I was struggling with it, I wondered what the wonderful people of God who put together the lectionary were thinking when they picked today's scriptures. It just didn't make sense. After a struggle for some time, I remembered what every preacher is required to do- read the lessons in their larger context.

What was so special about the Israelites keeping the Passover at Gilgal? If you know the story of the Israelites, this was a group of people whom God had marked as God's own people with a covenantal sign of circumcision. 40 years before this event at Gilgal, the Israelites had escaped from Egypt because of the merciless persecution they faced there. They wandered in the desert lands for 40 years until they began to finally settle again near this place called Gilgal.

This is very much the like the many refugees who escape their countries to start life again. It is not easy to start again. As an immigrant I have some personal experience of the challenge. Refugees basically start life from the scratch as an adult. They have no furniture, no bank accounts, & no family of their own who could help them get started. They are escaping something painful, but the road ahead is never easy. The old way of life ends as they anxiously try to move ahead.

By the time the Israelites had come to Gilgal all the older folks had died. The last time any Israelite was circumcised was 40 years ago in Egypt. This was a completely new generation. God tells Joshua that this new generation was to be circumcised as a mark that they were once again the people of God. Following this they were to partake in the Passover. It was a new start. A new beginning. The suffering they escaped from in Egypt and their risky journey in the desert lands was to come to an end. God called this place of new beginning Gilgal because Gilgal came from the verb which meant to roll. God declare to them: "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt."

This story makes me think that in God, there is always the possibility of a new beginning. When our past gets extremely difficult God opens a way to start again. To let the old painful past roll away from us. This Lent is a reminder of the possibility of Gilgal in our lives. A rolling away of pain so that we can keep the Passover anew.

Now to our dear St. Paul. I am drawn to the idea of creation. St. Paul's talk of a new creation is a very powerful imagery to me. Not the just the creation of the world but the idea & experience of creation which occurs in our everyday lives. When a child is born, I see it as the creative miracle that occurs regularly in our lives. I feel the closest to the transcendental work of God when I witness or think about birth. It's like God reaches down from heaven and breathes life into every new being. A complex and amazing miracle of life comes anew. To create is to imagine and bring to existence. It might seem impossible, especially because we do not see it exist. It might seem fanciful thinking since it is

not bound to the real. But ultimately, creation is a miracle. St. Paul's ultimate hope is that we become a new creation.

Maybe we feel things cannot get better. At least we don't see them getting better. We might think that the better us, the better world does not exist. But just because it does not exist does not mean that it cannot be imagined and created. Imagined and created by God. We are the product of God's imagination and creation. In Christ, we are a new creation. In Christ, what seemed impossible, is now infused with transcendental creative work to make something new, a new us. This Lent is a reminder that a new creation is possible.

When Jesus told the parable of the son who asks for his share of the property so that he could go and enjoy life, two things go wrong. First, the son is not careful in his spending. The parable says, "he squandered his property in dissolute living." And the second thing that goes wrong is that as soon as he spends all he has, a severe famine hits that region. He is now desperate & starving and may die if nothing changes soon. He has the good sense to return to his father, who forgives him immediately. But the sentence that captures that point of the story in the context of today's lectionary is what the father says after he receives his son back. "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!"

Lent is the possibility to live again despite death. Death is not the last word in the Christian faith. Lent is a reminder of the possibility to be alive again.

My dear people of God, Lent is a season of reminding us of the possibilities in God. To give hope where all hope was lost. A new beginning is possible. A new creation is possible. A new life is possible. It is possible in Christ who is our hope and salvation. Amen.