

St Thomas Church
Lent III
March 24, 2019
rmcneely+

He that is not with me
is against me:
and he that gathereth not with me
scattereth

OK. Third Sunday in Lent.

We are almost half way through the Lenten Season.

The Collect, Epistle and Gospel of today seem to be a jumble of unrelated ideas and a bit baffling.

But there is an important thread that ties them all together
So let me see if I can shed some light
on what is going on.

We all recall Paul's journeys to the eastern Mediterranean founding churches along the way.

And that after he had moved on, some of them went astray.

Paul must have been distressed to learn
that in some of the churches
he had worked so hard to establish,
the people had lapsed back
into their pagan ways after his departure.

Paul wrote to the churches reminding them of their Christian calling in what we have as his Epistles.

And so we get
these familiar
scolding harangues from Paul
with the lists of what we are to avoid
and what we are to do.

From about the 4th Century the custom has been that there
could be no baptisms during Lent
so it was a good time for people seeking baptism
to study the doctrines of the faith
in order to qualify for baptism on Easter Sunday.
Easter Sunday was not just a celebration of
Redemption
Salvation, and
Resurrection
But was the celebration of new life for dozens of
people, who were baptized that day

The church combed through St Paul's Epistles among the
other Church documents
for the ones that best instructed the catechumens,
the people preparing for baptism
and that is why they now appear during Lent.

The pagan world then,
much as our secular world today,
was steeped
in the laxity of all standards
but particularly the "lusts of the flesh"
which is why Paul seems to us to focus on them

The Lenten Epistles

point out the contrast
between the ethical standards
of paganism and of Christianity.

These Epistles of Paul

written in the first century
not long after the crucifixion, resurrection and
ascension,

were what the ancient Christians needed then
and what we need now
during Lent

to help us recognize our failings.

They are almost an outline for us to use to see how we
measure up,

To see where we need absolution and amendment of
our lives.

One of the constants in the Lenten Epistles,
is the notion
of light.

Lent brings us from the celestially dark days of winter
to the Vernal Equinox shortly before Easter.

In the Lenten days,

each day has an increasing amount of daylight.

Paul's reference to the light

is born out in our daily lives
as the celestial light of day
increasingly overtakes
the darkness of the night.

Paul sets up the theme of “light vs darkness” in today’s Epistle

in the same way he did with
the themes of “holiness vs uncleanness”
in last week’s epistle.

He mentions the light 5 times in 14 verses today: He writes

For ye were sometimes darkness but now are ye light
in the Lord.

Walk as children of light

All things that are reprov’d are made manifest by the
light

For whosoever doth make manifest is light

Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead and
Christ shall give thee light.

The light,

is a metaphor for the Word of God

The word of God as written in scripture

The commandments,

The prophets

The Epistles of Paul

Peter

James, John, and Jude

The 4 Gospels

recounting the story of Jesus, the Christ

The light, the word of God is our tool in Lent.

It is the light,
that we shine
in the dark recesses of our soul
to recognize
and root out
those sins in our life
That which we have done
That which we have not done

Sometimes you see the light referred to as a metaphor for
“Truth”.

In the sense that the word of God is true
And in the sense that knowledge promotes truth
But also as a bright flashlight of truth
that can illuminate the darkness,
where the evil resides
and does its destruction.

The light of knowledge and truth
once trained upon the evil ones
and upon their evil deeds
seemingly consumes them
in the way that radiation therapy in modern medicine
seems to consume tumors.

But there is another important sense
in which we know
the “Word of God”.

St. John describes it in the opening verses of his Gospel:

*In the beginning was the Word
And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.
Jesus is the Word of God.*

So, it is by focusing the “light” upon our souls, even the dark recesses of our souls:

Focusing the inner workings of Scripture and Truth
in our lives
and by focusing the inner working of Jesus
in our lives
that our sins are blotted out of our souls
and out of our lives.

And that is the work we are doing now during Lent.
The light is our tool.

Notice the uncompromising nature of the Lenten Epistles.
Paul points us to light and dark in absolute terms.

When it comes to how to live a Christian Life
There is no nuance
No negotiation
No room for exception or for re-interpretation.
One of the Lenten temptations is to try to bargain with God.
To maybe skip over
Or redefine a failing
To maybe reduce its harm or consequence.
As Paul hints, God will have none of it.

The light shining into darkness

The light of the word of God
 The light of truth
 bears independent objective
 witness.

There can be no shade of grey.
 Our behaviour is either sinful or it is not.
 As Paul

The Gospel for today contains a number of elements;
 We see that Jesus
 is greater than the forces of evil
 and even before his crucifixion, resurrection and
 ascension,
 He was already battling the devil and winning.

We can have confidence in Him
 to wage that same battle in our lives.
 He declares that
 “If I, with the finger of God, cast out devils
 —no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.”

Today’s Collect prays to Almighty God
 To “stretch forth the right hand of His Majesty
 To be our defense
 Against all our enemies.”

In our Lenten battle
 with sin and the devil,
 we call upon Jesus,
 the Christ,
 to be at our shoulder in the fight.

Jesus then gives us the first of two parables;

The first involves a strong man in his palace
who believes he is protected by his armor
and the strength of the walls he has erected.

But a stronger man than he overcomes him.

The parable is this;

the “strong man” is the devil,
placing all his strength and confidence in
himself.

The stronger man is Jesus, who will overcome the evil one.

The second parable has practical Lenten advice and
caution.

As we succeed in removing our sinful habits,

In removing the demons that sometimes inhabit our
lives we leave a void.

We need to occupy the space they have vacated
in our lives

So that the demons do not return in force
So that our sinful ways do not re-occur.

We are to re-fill that void

with behavior
that would make even St Paul happy.

Using the tools of the Lenten Epistles, and the defense

Of the right hand of His Majesty
we amend our lives and we follow the scriptures
and the light, the word and the truth

In time we become the children of light.

But the Gospel also contains a chilling warning:

Jesus says:

“He that is not with me
is against me:
and he that gathereth not with me
scattereth”.

When it comes to matters of Christian ethics and standards,
there is no middle ground.
We cannot be neutral.
We must choose.

If we are not with Him,
we are against Him.
And if against Him
Without Him
we are scattered
like a scattered flock of sheep,
whose only defense
their union together in numbers
is absent
and will fall prey to the predators.

Our lives will be troubled at times
And our faith challenged

But we are with Him

And He is at our shoulder
In prayer
In meditation and study
In our Lenten discipline
And in the body of Christ,
This little miracle of a church

And in a few moments we join Him
In Communion

Let the light of Lent
The knowledge of truth
be our beacon

Let us chose to be the Children of Light, chose Christ Jesus
at our side.