

Lent Devotional March 29, 2019

SCRIPTURE

John 8:33-47

³³They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free?’” ³⁴Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. ³⁸I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.” ³⁹They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did, ⁴⁰ but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹You are indeed doing what your father does.” They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.” ⁴²Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. ⁴⁴You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.”

DEVOTIONAL

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“‘We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me’” (vv. 41-42). During these 40 days of reflection on Jesus’ death for our sins and the renewal of our baptismal commitment, a lot is at stake. Are we following Jesus, or our own sinful desires?

My work with homeless and low-income individuals allows me to ask this question of myself when I am on the streets. Jesus tells us, “everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). When we pass by someone in need in order to take care of our own needs first, that is sin. And “the slave has no permanent place in the household” (v. 35). When we feed the hungry, house the homeless, put clothes on the naked, we are following Jesus, who invited all to feast at the table.

A couple of years ago in Portland, I stopped under a bridge to escape an approaching rainstorm. There I met Charlie. Charlie had lost his home and family, but not his dignity. Charlie had also lost his church—it had kicked him out because of his substance use and joblessness—but not his faith. We prayed, and when I asked him what he missed about church, his response was, “Communion.” He knew that his sins were hurting himself and others, and it had been close to twenty-years since he had taken Communion. I told him to hang on, then brought a pastor friend, some coffee, and a sandwich, and the three of us, under the bridge, shared Communion. We all cried; then Charlie blessed us on our way. I left with the amazing feeling that we had pleased God, and the Spirit was alive in Charlie. Charlie had prayed for our visit for nearly two decades. Isn’t it amazing how the Holy Spirit works!

PRAYER

Creator and sustainer, here we are, thanking you for the day of Easter ahead and the laughter of your children of all ages. Lord, we sometimes fall off the wagon and think of ourselves before others, including the strangers we have yet to meet. You remind us of this failing, yet stick by us through all our errors. Lord, we are blessed to be children in your kingdom, and though we are not perfect, we know you understand and are there to guide us. Please keep our brothers and sisters safe, give us the hope we are seeking, and remind us of our baptism, especially during this Lenten season. In your Holy Name we pray. Amen.