

John Bonner, III
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 Ash Wednesday

“Be Reconciled to God”

Gabriel Marcel in his play “The Broken World” has the witty, fashionable Christiane, whose busy life masks an inner grief, speak these words:

“Don’t you feel sometimes that we are living ... if you can call it living ... in a broken world? Yes, broken like a broken watch. The mainspring has stopped working. Just to look at it, nothing has changed. Everything is in place. But put the watch to your ear, and you don’t hear any ticking. You know what I’m talking about, the world, what we call the world, the world of human creatures ... it seems to me it must have had a heart at one time, but today you would say the heart had stopped beating.”

This is the vision of the world in the seventeenth and eighteenth century deists view, unlike Richard Hooker’s grand vision of an orderly world. But today, being Ash Wednesday, we tend to look hard and need to look hard at a world, at our lives, whose ‘heart has stopped beating’ in union with God’s desire. Where there was wholeness there is brokenness, where there was coherence there is anarchy, where there was meaning there is meaninglessness, where there was good there is evil, and where there was beauty there is ugliness.. so the sensitive soul discerns and despairs.

Hooker writes that “the will of man is inwardly obstinate, rebellious, and averse from all obedience unto the sacred laws of his nature... This is the supreme tragedy.” God’s will is union with Him; It is the life of God. We lose that which is our greatest desire. Hooker says that pride is the fundamental root sin. Pride sets the whole world off of its course. This is the subject of the third chapter of Genesis, that which we call “the Fall.”

We gather on this day of repentance to hear of God’s dearest desire which is our happiness, our communion with Him and with each other. It is always my deepest responsibility to preach God’s love, God’s mercy, God’s forgiveness to those who will repent. The Holy Spirit, through the deep mercy and grace of God, is constantly pushing us and prodding us toward God to effect union with Him. To speak of grace is to speak of love, mercy, forgiveness, and newness of life.

Love must precede repentance. To know that God is love is to rid yourself of fear and guilt engendered by sin and, letting God be God, begin to love again, and in the realization of that love, that communion with God, recognize and repent of our sins, rejoicing in the power of God’s love to forgive sin, even those sins of which we may not be conscious at this time.

The reality of sin requires of each of us constant vigilance and a regular participation in corporate worship with its rhythm of contrition and praise. God’s great gift to humanity is ‘reason.’ The light of reason illuminates the good for us, even as we are captives to sin. But we are not only worth saving, as God’s creation, but we can be saved, whatever our present condition may be.

The Christ event in history is the sure knowledge that God became human, revealing true humanity and enabling the deification of our humanity. God created all things, including humanity, and God brings all to fulfillment. The reach of the divine love is infinite. Understanding this enables us to enter into communion with the holy and just God. Knowing this enables us to repent and lead new lives that reflect this loving God. In this awareness of divine, self-giving love, we are turned from our selfish ways to love of God and love of neighbor. This is what Ash Wednesday is about. As Jesus turns toward Jerusalem we are to turn from our sin.

Stephen Bayne wrote this:

“God put freedom into the created universe in order that that universe could respond to His love with an answering love of its own. If He had wanted simply obedience, He could have had it. If

He had wanted to create in His universe simply a mirror of His own perfection, He could have done so. If He had intended, in the creation of time and space, simply to establish a stage where he could have portrayed His own character, He could have done so. There is no law outside of His own nature to gainsay what he wills.

But He did not do any of these things. He put into the created universe a principle of choice; and He paid a twofold price for that. First, he limited His own freedom to have everything His own way. Second, he committed Himself to have to win out of freedom what he could perfectly easily have commanded as of right.

In light of our poor choices it would not be surprising if God gave up on us.
BUT He did not, rather ...

God has not abandoned us here. He does not stand off from us in some inscrutable majesty, leaving us trapped in our own devices; nor is He remote in the universe, roaring with laughter at His creatures struggling with questions which are too big for them and too which they can have no adequate answers. In His love he comes Himself within our own framework, accepting the limitations which we must accept, and redeeming us from inside our freedom, by living it out before our eyes.”

On this Ash Wednesday know of God’s hopes and God’s love for us. I give you a reminder to carry with you during this season of Lent. Come and know of His forgiveness and let it be our own. Take to heart these His gifts as your Lenten journey begins. Amen.