

## WHEN I AM LIFTED UP

Lent is often about remembering. Going back over familiar territory but territory we haven't visited in a while. Take the biblical account of the original sin. Our fore-parents have been placed in the Garden of Eden by God. They have access to everything they need including plentiful food, a safe environment, daily visits with and intimacy and closeness with God. BUT. There are some limitations. After all, they have been created by God and they are limited in certain ways precisely because they are creatures. God has spoken to Adam about these restrictions, about all he will have access to and what he will not.

We know the story about the serpent deceiving Eve who in turn prevails upon Adam to join her in eating the forbidden fruit. What we need to remember, what we need to recall and reflect upon is this question: Why? Why did they do it? What were they thinking? What is the essence of their sin? It is this: They believed that there is something better in life than what God has offered. Something much more vital, more exhilarating, more exciting, more fulfilling, more meaningful. They thought that God did not offer them anything like that. Then they began to think that God doesn't really care. God really isn't reliable. His word is not trustworthy and therefore is not to be believed. That's their sin. Don't we think like that sometimes? Doesn't it sound familiar in places?

But, there they are in the very garden God provided. How did they come to begin to believe that God was holding out on them? Of course there just happens to be another voice in the garden, speaking another word. Whose voice? Well they actually don't rightly know because no person steps up to claim it. There was this serpent though. But that word sure does tickle their ears. It sounded really good. That word says things they tended to believe in their hearts or they wanted to believe, or things that made sense to them. They had this sense that God was somehow holding out on them, not doing all he could for them, not really sharing everything with them. This other voice tells them that they really can do a lot of different things, they can live pretty much the way they want and all will be okay. It is a lie of course. A big lie. But they are susceptible to the lie. But one thing about this voice. It promises a great deal. It panders to their self-seeking side. It just doesn't ever really deliver. It is a lying voice, a deceiving voice and it belongs to the enemy, who is invisible but very real and who still prowls about the earth seeking someone to devour. And now, you or I are just about as good as anyone.

God knows this lie. God knows we are so susceptible to this lie. God chooses to intervene to make things right again. But it will certainly take some doing. And it will certainly take some time. And it will certainly take a great deal of planning. Now I have sometimes wondered at various times in my life why God didn't just wave his hand and makes things right, restore everything in the nanosecond of time it would take and then let us get on with it? Makes sense to me. Isn't that what you would probably do just to get

everything back to the way it was and start over? Well, perhaps. But would that heal the now sin-infected heart? Would the woundedness be overcome? Would the regret be transformed into goodness? Would there even be regret?

No, God wanted to set things right but so much more than that. In the beginning God had something exquisitely beautiful in mind for his human and earthly creation. That is why he endowed us with the gift of our freedom. So that we could align our hearts with his own; that we could make the gift of ourselves to Him as He had made the gift of himself to us. Bishop Robert Barron puts it this way: “In his passion to set right a disjointed world God broke open his own heart in love, sending to us his own Son, into our dysfunction to gather the whole world into the bliss of his own life.” What a wonderful idea. What a wonderful plan for our lives. Into the very love that unites the Father and the Son, their own Holy Spirit every person is invited including the worst person and the most hopeless.

Ask yourself this question: Do you think that God’s love for us stops when we sin? And if you do, do you think that God’s love for us starts up again when we are sorry or strive to be good? My friends, that is not the way it works. God’s love lasts—despite our sin. God’s love is not yes and no depending on what we do or don’t do. God’s love abides. If I turn away it will have no beneficial effect on me. But I cannot even turn back to God without God’s assistance and God’s grace enabling and empowering me to do so. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. BUT. People preferred darkness. Darkness? Nighttime. Nighttime? Why nighttime? Because so many of our acts of selfishness and sin we seek to hide under the cover of darkness. We know they are wrong. We don’t want them to be known. Even Judas goes out from the Last Supper. And the evangelist says so simply. It was night. Yes. We too choose to hide our sins from God—just like our first parents did way back when. But my friends, they could not actually do that. And we cannot either.

Who can deliver us from all of this? Only One. Only One who comes from God but who can also speak for us. Only One who is both divine and human. Only One whose own human heart has been fashioned from the divine heart. Only One who is willing to go to any length to prove to us—and to our –fore-parents—that God does care, that God holds back nothing, that God’s word actually is the most reliable thing in this whole world. That there really is nothing more exciting, more exhilarating, more vital, more meaningful than the love of God made visible to us in and through the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Our Master. Our Messiah. God’s Word—in our flesh. At the midway point of this Lenten season let us remember—and rejoice!

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.