

CHAINED TO THE STUMP
[written in oral form]

Our Advent theme this year is "Freedom Bound", with each Sunday having a sub theme. Today's is the Path of Justice.

If you've noticed, the Advent wreath is draped with chains, representing bondage--symbolic of things that block the path to freedom. {a chain will be removed each time a candle is lit}

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The Old Testament lesson is about justice. The text is set in difficult and frustrating times, and Jeremiah is trying to give his people hope. Jeremiah mentions a righteous branch springing up that will execute Justice and righteousness. Even though he doesn't mention a stump as Isaiah did, we imagine this new sprout coming up from a stump.

In the Gospel lesson, Jesus seems to be talking about his second coming, which is predicted to happen in "that" generation.

Well,.....it's been 2,000 years, and we tend to not be too concerned about such apocalyptic forecasts.

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We could conclude that these passages really don't offer anything for us. We live in relative comfort / in safety and with abundance. We have so much abundance that, this time of year, we spend lots of money buying gifts for people, and then spend more money to wrap them up to look pretty. We have it easy, and we have a fairly good judicial system, too. Moreover, we are also **not** worried about the world ending soon, so..... .. well.... we could just light an Advent candle, sing a song,....and go home.

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However, there **is** more to these passages than a history lesson, and God's word is not chained to print composed thousands of years ago.

Looking closer at these texts, we'll discover that the message is relevant..... and even "alive".

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Jeremiah was a preacher during the years of 677-586 BCE, and those were turbulent times. One country of central concern was Babylon, which was in the same area as present day Iraq. Iraq is not the empire that Babylon was back then, but it is a place of significant concern, today, because of ISIS. In addition, when Jeremiah wrote, the nation of Assyria was falling apart,....much as Syria is today.

This text is written to people caught in the middle of it all,.... although geographically we are far away,.... we are still in the middle of the mess going on there, as are other nations.

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Jeremiah declared that hope / resolution would come from a new way/ a new sprout--the way of righteousness and justice.

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I wonder if righteousness and justice would work better than dropping bombs, training armies and flooding the area with weapons.

Imagine if Israel became a place of righteousness and justice, and what if Western Nations also pushed Saudi Arabia to be a just and fair nation, too. ???

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Yet, we humans tend to have a narrow view on most things. We usually address the immediate pain, and little more.

ISIS and all the refugees are causing us pain, so we want to..... do something about it /.....we want to end the pain.

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Societies have a high tolerance for injustices and corruption. Corruption is the opposite of righteousness. Societies have a high tolerance for injustices and corruption AS LONG as there is stability, predictability and the illusion of economic improvement. This is true here in our country, too. We've mostly ignored climate change.....because we fear the solutions required might jeopardize our stability and economic security.

Yes, we'd rather have stability/ predictability than justice.

Back in 2010, the vast majority of Canadians did Not complain about all the abuse and violence the demonstrators endured during the G8/G20 protests in Toronto. Most even believed the official label given to the protestors, which was "anarchists".

Only a handful of demonstrators provoked violence, and they were of no threat.

However, thousands and thousands of people demanding "change" ARE threatening!

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It takes a lot,.... a huge amount of motivation and energy to change.

It really does.

And, it's too bad that we wait to change until the motivation is pain, ....and sometimes it's too late by then.

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Refugees and the Paris bombing gave us some pain,.... not as much as the bombing of the Russian plane,.....for some reason,.... and refugees in Sub-Sahara Africa are not that painful for us.

Maybe we are more worried about pain than righteousness and justice, and that should be clarified to mean "our own pain."

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We are a little bothered by the sweat shops in Asia, the terrible working conditions in China and the disruptions in Indonesia and Malaysia.

And, we may try to channel our clothing purchases to "cleaner" areas, but we won't do without our other cheap consumer goods, such as cell phones.

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Africa rarely is in our consciousness, unless children are kidnapped. That is painful to know about.

Generally, we are not concerned and thus aware about the injustices and terrible conditions elsewhere in Africa.

Few are demanding that France release its imperial grip on 14 African nations. France requires each nation pay high taxes and royalties to France,....keeping them subjugated, corrupt and impoverished.

[<http://www.siliconafrika.com/france-colonial-tax/>]

Likewise we are not too concerned about justice and righteousness in South America, or what Canadian mining companies are doing in SA.

There are hurting and suffering people all around the globe, and our planet is in turmoil, too.

We are troubled about climate change,.....but are we troubled / pained enough to change? We know that climate change is the world's greatest security threat,.....yet it hasn't affected us too much, yet.

Moreover, Not all is wonderful in Canada.

4.8 million Canadians live in poverty; that's 1 in 7 people, and the rate is much higher with First Nations people.

[<http://www.cwp-csp.ca/poverty/just-the-facts/>]

Sadly, all this greed, corruption, injustices and suffering are going on ...while the church battles itself about how to interpret 7 verses in the Bible.

Maybe Jeremiah is speaking to us?

Maybe we are as a stump.....no longer reaching out, alive and vibrant.

A stump is what's left after the productive part of the tree is cut off.

Maybe the church's self serving lust to remain rooted and stable has cut off what gives life / what grows and changes. And, I don't think we can blame the Babylonians or ISIS for our demise.

Yet,.....perhaps, we could take heed to what Jeremiah said,... and start nurturing and protecting the sprout--by doing justice in a loving, righteous manner.

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We understand the sprout to be Jesus.

We understand righteousness and justice through Jesus.

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Even so, our peaceful and pure Messiah, in Luke 21, presented intense warnings of calamity, about the temple falling down, about great distress upon the earth, roaring waves, persecution and paralyzing fear.

He couldn't have been talking about his own second coming...because he said all those things would happen to his contemporaries / that generation.

So then, was Jesus clairvoyant? Could he see the future?

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Maybe God, on a occasion, gave him that insight. ???

Or, it could be that Jesus was seeing how things were trending?

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Perhaps? Yet, the destruction of the temple and the dispersal of the Jews didn't happen until 70 CE, over 30 years after Jesus died.

There is the thought, that Luke wrote his account after 70 CE, and embellished a little. ???

Those possible interpretations dwell on the specifics of the situation; those theories are insignificant and vane speculation.

The heart of the message is important, and it is: be ready; rise up and receive redemption, and know that the kingdom of God is near.

I'm inclined to think that what Jesus said is personal, and very relevant for any time.

Jesus stated that, "All those things we cherish and worship will crumble into nothing when we face and receive God's love--our redemption we see in Christ.

Our temples will fall down.

Our sense of what keeps us safe will disappear.

The need to have stability and security will be destroyed.

Embracing and receiving our redemption Brings God's kingdom / God's way near to us,,,,,and old mountains will crumble into the sea.

But, be forewarned: breaking free is a frightful experience.

It is much safer and easier to be chained to a stump, than to be free.

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This past week, I reread the writings of Brother Lawrence.

He was a monk who lived over 300 years ago. His sole desire was to be present with God. Everything he did, including kitchen duty, was with the awareness that God was present with him.

He was constantly overwhelmed by God's love and grace,... and that divine love / that divine presence touched everyone he met.

Brother Lawrence was not concerned about dogma. He didn't engage in systematic theology. He didn't try to proclaim what was right, yet by the love of God he was righteous, .... and that righteousness poured out as justice.

He loved. He loved people where they were, no matter who they were.

His simple message was invite God into everything; be present with God, and he lived that awareness and passion.

He simply lived it.

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He did share how he was redeemed / how he received God's love.

He said that he pondered a leafless, lifeless tree in the dead of winter, and realized that deep within the tree was the ability to sprout and grow when the radiance of Spring arrived. Like an earthquake it hit him that he was like that lifeless tree with the potential to break forth / to break free....if he responded to the radiant love of God.

His life was turned upside down. His old temples crashed to the ground, and he evidently became a monk. To be sure, he made mistakes, as he grew in the awareness of God's ever present love. Each time, he repented, knowing God was gracious, and knowing he had just learned another lesson about God's love.

It's about being with God... being with love. ~~~~~

Before us today, is the imaginary image of a stump.

The stump could represent ourselves. It could represent the church or the condition of our planet. It doesn't matter,.....because we are connected to the whole.

We exist alone and as part of the church and the world.

Our consumerism touches people in China and elsewhere.

Our consumption and luxuries contribute to climate change and exploitation.

Our insecurity is terrorizing people in the middle east, in Africa and elsewhere, and they are terrorizing others.

Our bondage to self-sufficiency and financial security is making people poor.

Our arrogance, haughtiness is hurting the church, minorities and each other.

And, our fear is preventing us from changing and growing.

Perhaps, we are not so free, and our bondage is enslaving others.

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The past couple of years we have lifted up the theme of "transformation". We talk of it as if it is a stout shot of coffee, but it's **not**. Spiritual Transformation is a **tornado**. It turns the world upside down.

Transformation is a new sprout surging from a stump.

Transformation is righteousness and justice,.....and that sprout grows by being present, always present in the love of God.

Consider the stump, and as Jesus put it, "stand and raise your head because your redemption is drawing near," .....to you and everyone.

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When we realize that consumerism is resistible,

When we learn that correctness does not make us righteous,

When we discover that justice flows when we let go of fear,

When we see our own chains holding us down,.....

Then.....the burdens of others will begin to be lifted,

Then.....all people will start discovering justice..... and peace.....

And,..... God's kingdom will be near.....

When we remove our chains to rise and receive the redeeming love and presence of God..., then the righteous branch will grow and grow,...before this generation passes.