

Nov 17, 2024

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Texts: Hebrews 11; Psalm 103; Mark 13: 1-8

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The people who lived in Jerusalem, before the Hebrew people arrived, worshipped the god Moloch, who required the sacrifice of children. And the Hebrew people when they moved into Jerusalem found this so abhorrent that they destroyed that site and turned it into the town's garbage dump—where worms crawled in and out of the garbage day and night, and fires burned without ever going out. The Hebrew name for this is *Gehenna*, translated into English as 'Hell'. Now, you know where it comes from—and those images, where they come from.

Sacrifice is so primitive—*'unless we need it'*. Right? Women are being sacrificed today. You didn't do anything wrong—you're just women who act like you want human lives, and to be real persons. And patriarchy finds that unacceptable. *"We're not going to go there."*

Children are still being sacrificed—1200 still in cages on the [US-Mexico] border. The hungry, the poverty-stricken around the world working as slaves. Moloch is still alive and doing well.

Immigrants, refugees—well, they're easy targets. And the caste system. *"You know, we work so hard to put everything in order so that we can denigrate the appropriate people at the right time. It's just very important to us. The entire thing—worthless—but we believe in it, right?"* Step outside these doors and everyone you meet knows how the caste system works, and where or whether you fit in it. Yeah.

So, Jesus exposes this old sacrificial order. He takes part in this life as a victim, and he refuses any and all collaboration with violence—for which he is violently executed. That's the story.

But he founds this new community of victims—and those who protect victims—and the community is called, *'Resurrection'*. That's what we're doing here. If we're not doing that, Moloch is still in charge.

A legal scholar, a scribe, came to Jesus and asked him, *'What is the greatest commandment?'* And Jesus said, *"The Shema—Love God, heart, soul, mind, strength with all your being [Deuteronomy 6: 5], and love your neighbors as yourself"*. [Mark: 12: 31] Loving God with all that we are, with all of our being, with every ounce of our being, leaves no room for idolatry, which is the sacrificial system of victims.

And the manifestation of idolatry—the way it operates—is vengeance. *‘Take care of those who aren't like you.’* Idolatry, of course, has no truth in it. It's all about lies and deception. It loves to be in power. And it justifies all of its lies with vengeance. *‘I told you they were wrong. Let's get rid of them.’* It's effective, right? Some of us have had occasions to practice vengeance, haven't we? It's in us too. It's in us, too.

The web of sacrificial violence must be—and has been—broken by a network of Love, living in that new community of Resurrection. That scribe, that lawyer, said to Jesus, *“You have spoken elegantly. Surely love, merciful love, is more important than sacrificing others.”* [Mark 12:32-33] And from that time on, the text says, *“Nobody dared to question Jesus.”* [Mark 12:34] Not in his presence. They weren't going to mess around with him anymore.

So, the disciples, as we heard in the text, are just enthralled with the grandeur of the Temple. And Jesus says, *“Not one of these stones will remain on top of the others.”* [Mark 13:2] And he was right. 40 years later, 70 AD, CE [the Common Era], the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, and demolished the Temple, shoving all of the stones over the edge of the Temple Mount. And there they rest till today, in a rubble heap two thousand years old. Some of you have seen it; Jerusalem? (Nobody's seen it?) Bev and I were privileged to see it. It's just sitting there, a huge mound of stones— 2,000 years later.

And why did it happen? Corruption—corruption of the faith, corruption of the Wisdom path, corruption of the peoples, corruption of the society. It all falls apart when based on deceit and lies.

Last week we had the text about the widow dropping her last two coins into the Temple Treasury. [Mark 12:32-34] And the way most of us heard that story growing up, she sacrificed so much—*‘Poor Widow’*, we say *‘She's a pious hero because she really trusted God.’*

Wrong. She's the sacrifice. She's the scapegoat that they're getting rid of. *‘Who needs widows/old women? What do they count for? They don't matter; they're not productive, right?’*

She's the sacrifice. That's what Jesus is revealing. That's why not everybody liked him.

And in the new community, it becomes crystal clear that each person and every person is worth more than the entire sacrificial system, a whole new emphasis on who we are, and who every one of our brothers and sisters is. (Hmm.)

So then, the disciples really get turned on. *‘Is he talking about the end times? It's all going to end. We want that insiders' scoop.’ Tell us, Jesus, tell us what's it going to be like when everything is destroyed?’* [Matthew 13:3-4] (For 2000 years, people have been fascinated by this, even though it's right in the [New Testament] that this is of no interest to Jesus.)

Jesus says in response, *'Take care no one deceives you. Many will come claiming my name, saying 'I am he', and they will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Something is happening, but the end will not be yet. Nations fighting nations, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, fires, famines—Covid! These are all birth pangs, contractions* [Mark 13: 5-8], because a new world, a new age is emerging

Now, we are living in a time of contractions, aren't we? And we don't like it.  
(Most women report to me that they haven't liked it, either, in childbirth.)

What's the Word, what's the Word saying? *'Just anchor down. Hold to the truth. Practice the love in your hearts. Don't deceive or be deceived.'* Yeah, we've ignored that for about 2,000 years. Yeah, just contractions, heavy-duty contractions.

So then how shall we live in this disturbing time? Well, like Abraham and Sarah, who at a great age were summoned to a new and distant land far, far away—they had no clue where it is. They didn't know their destiny. They didn't know the destination. They didn't know what it would mean, but they said, *'Yes, I guess we have to go over here'* and that's called Faith. No evidence—not from the visible world—but an interior connection calling, summoning. All of us have experienced it, huh? Pointers, hints, suggestions from somewhere. A friend says something, and we go, *'That could be me.'* Happens more than we know, doesn't it?

So, like Abraham and Sarah, let us meander and wander into this new experience. Destiny unknown, but it's the right direction. And as we go, let us do it in the spirit of Psalm 103. Take a look at that once more.

*Bless the Lord. O my soul,  
and praise God my inmost heart,  
Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and remember God's unchanging love:  
who forgives all your wrongdoing  
and heals you of selfishness and fear;  
who frees you from that darkest pit  
and crowns us with his compassion;  
who pours light into you and makes you  
as fresh and vivid as a child.*

(Let's read the last two paragraphs together, beginning with Bless the Lord.)

*Bless the Lord, you angels,  
echoing with the sound of light!  
Bless the Lord, people of mystery,  
who have grown transparent in God's love  
Bless the Lord, all creatures,  
through infinite dimensions of this*

*world!*

*Bless the Lord, O my soul.  
O my soul, bless the Lord!*

Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.