

March 13, 2022

Pr. Steve

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

Ever since the days of Cain and Abel.... Ever since the days when Cain slew Abel, human beings have believed that for there to be peace among us, someone's got to die. Something has to die. There has to be a blood sacrifice that proves we can live peacefully.

Abram gladly accepts God's promise, *'Your progeny, future generations, will come to you more numerous than the stars.'* He trusted God there. But then he asked, *'But now, how is this land deal going to work that I'm going to get? (Isn't that great?) I just want to be sure about that. Where's the land coming from?'* [Gen 15: 4-8]

So, he's instructed to slaughter these animals, cut them in half, lay them across from each other. And then in a deep vision, in the middle of the night, filled with terror and dread, Abram's in this trance state, and he experiences a censer, or fire-pot, much bigger than this one. Fire, smoke, incense. Imagine this passing between the halves of the animal in the middle of the night, the length of the church here, just... Whoosh, whoosh. Can you imagine? And the message is--God says, *'Let it be to me like these animals if I ever betray you. Let it be to me what's happened to these animals if I should ever abandon you.'* God is making 'covenant' with Abram, and a covenant is a unilateral commitment to bless you, no matter what. Unilateral. No matter what the circumstances are, no matter what you choose to do. *'If you turn your back and walk away from me, I am here. I have made the pledge. I will do only blessings of you and your family and generations to come.'* That's what Covenant is. It's not a contractual deal, is it? And it's not dependent upon your response. *'I have pledged. This is real.'*

So in the gospel today [Luke 13:31-34], the Pharisees threatened Jesus. 'Herod's out to kill you, you better get out of here. And Jesus says, *'What do I care about Herod? He can do whatever he wants. I'm here to bless and to heal, to restore, and reconcile. My life is not dependent upon his.'* And then Jesus speaks with supreme irony, *'How is it possible that any prophet should be sacrificed outside of Jerusalem?'* Whew! Wow is right! Have you ever heard of such a thing? This is what Jerusalem specializes in.

Jesus, who is so compassionate with the wounded, and the broken and the refugees, is just scathing with the hypocrites, and the pious and those who are indifferent to the needs and sufferings of others. And he goes on, *'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, city of peace.'* (That's what it means.) *Do you remember, city of Shalom, you who killed the prophets and stoned the truth-tellers sent to you?*

*How I longed to gather you as a hen would gather her chicks* [Luke 13: 34], to gather in, to collect, to hold, to embrace. This gathering is the work of Jesus. That's what it's all about--forever bringing together. (And this has been a profound gift of women throughout the generations. It is not the only gift, but painfully, most men don't understand this.) It doesn't matter who [you are], what you've done. You belong. You're part of that hen-gathering--

collecting broken, wounded, hurting, strong, weak, lost, confused, enemies. Bring them in--aren't we Family? Gather them in--this is called love. Love which always attracts, draws together, intrigues, creates, inspires. And love always, always, always wants to gather into unity. Always.

What if each of us was to become a center of love? That's why we exist on the planet. If each of us was to become an oasis of peace, this being--it's all I want to be about: each one of us choosing that. Imagine the rippling effects of that peace--being grounded in, just moving out and beyond, with that influence--the gathering.

Can you imagine that? What's it feel like in your body--to imagine yourself being a center of love, an oasis of peace? Instead of reacting to all of the garbage with which we are constantly bombarded, what if our focus became serenity? *'I'm going to cultivate calm in my life and grounding, so that I will have clarity, and a deeper understanding, and I can make new kinds of choices.'*

This is what our Forum series is all about during Lent. For example, let's say you're driving in traffic this next week, and another idiotic obnoxious thing happens in front of you. Well, instead of just screaming, *'You moron!'*, you could try, *'God bless you, brother and sister, because you clearly need it.'* ... (Nah, that's not going to work!)

At any rate, what if more of us were centers of love and oases of peace? How might that impact, diminish, perhaps dissolve, hatred and division, and the violence which surrounds us?

All I know is we blossom in the presence of people who believe in us, don't we? You can feel that instantaneously inside of you. We blossom with people who believe in us. And that's what Jesus' entire ministry is about. In fact, that's what he's given his life for--that we might blossom.

He made a New Covenant with us, a unilateral commitment, to bless, and bless, and bless us, no matter what. When we turn our backs, when we walk away, when we forget, we will be blessed. We will be blessed, for God never gives up on us. That's Jesus' core message--and why we continue to feed on this meal.

We shouldn't give up either.

Amen.

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