

**St. Paul's Anglican Church**  
**3d Sun in Lent; Luke 11:14 to 28**  
**March 24, 2019**

**The Rev. Tom Burr**

Here we are in the midst of another Lenten season, still struggling to get it right. We have probably had some successes; we may have gained some new spiritual insights, we may have increased our Bible reading; and we may have even been more tolerant as we absorb life's trials and injustices. But we are probably still not in that place of great peace where we constantly feel the awesome presence.

All who have faith in Jesus Christ will one day achieve this beautiful and never-ending peace; it is called heaven. In the meantime, we must continue the age-old practice of striving to choose right over wrong; good over evil; the light of our Savior over the darkness associated with Satan.

Maintaining a clear vision that our story in this life ends with the beginning of a beautiful and never-ending peace in the next life, can be difficult. And, keeping our focus on improving our witness to the saving grace of our Lord, by becoming more Christ-like, can be hampered in a world barraged by news of plane crashes, senseless mass shootings, and devastating loss of life due to storms and earth quakes. And, when we consider the rampant immoral behavior in our society, some of which is now a legal right, we may wonder if our effort to do godly right by living and spreading the gospel message, is futile.

In the days of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah, this feeling of futility and despair was widespread in Jerusalem. The Israelites forced bondage in Babylon had ended and they were free to return to their homeland. Even though God called them to return to Him and to rebuild the temple, many believed they were God's "forgotten people". In our reading (Zech. 1:1-6,12-17), Zechariah assures them they are still God's "chosen people."

Here is God's message delivered by the prophet: **The Lord was very angry with your fathers.** Their ancestors sinned greatly, and failed to admit their mistakes seeking forgiveness. But now, they are encouraged, **the Lord said, return to me, and I will return to you.** "Focus on doing the moral right I have called you to do; seek forgiveness when you fail, but always walk with Me."

Then Zechariah is instructed to prophesy about a future for Israel as bright, beautiful and peaceful as the one we anticipate. **The Lord shall comfort Zion.** They thought their situation was hopeless, then God revealed his plan; they will be restored. We believe this future restoration of Israel can only be fully accomplished through the work of the Messiah-Jesus.

In our gospel reading (Luke 11:14-28), Messiah-Jesus has begun his journey to Jerusalem where his crucifixion and resurrection will be an enormous step in the process of restoring Israel and calling all the nations of the world to God. Our reading begins with a healing miracle as He casts out a demon which prevented a poor soul from speaking. In those days, many who were physically or psychologically challenged were said to be demon possessed.

When the afflicted was able to speak, some of those who witnessed the healing attributed our Lord's miracle to the power of Satan. Some challenged Him by asking Him to give them a sign from heaven. Jesus is quick to point out the absurdity in both of these personal attacks. He basically said, "If Satan were to overthrow one of his minions, his kingdom would be in a state of chaos and would collapse." To the second criticism He responded, **if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.** "What were you thinking? You asked for a sign from heaven when I just gave you a powerful one by giving this person the ability to speak!"

Our Lord is delivering the extremely important message that He is the Messiah sent from God; He **is** God, and He is more powerful than Satan. By overcoming the demon, Satan's defeat has already begun. He emphasizes this point in the parable of the

strong man (Satan) being overcome by the stronger man (God).

Understanding this point is vital and very appropriate for our Lenten season. This means whatever sin or bad habit that prevents us from sharing that special fellowship with our Savior that we were created to enjoy, can be overcome. It means, if we are struggling to improve our prayer life, our Bible knowledge, or just trying to more consistently model Christian love, the Holy Spirit alive in each of our hearts, empowers us to do so.

A second parable in this reading explains why these two Lenten disciplines (less sin, doing right with love), are really just one discipline. Jesus said, **when an unclean spirit is gone, he searches for a new home, and finding none, he says, I will return to my old house.** The old bad habit not only returns, **he brings seven other spirits** (bad habits) **with him.**

Our human weakness allows Jesus to be visible, but only in the distance. Tap into the love, power and guidance of the Holy Spirit to identify and eliminate our weakness, and then, by that same love, power and guidance replace it with a godly activity that transports us closer and closer to our Savior.

Close fellowship with our Savior is the exact condition St. Paul is describing in our epistle reading from Ephesians (Eph. 5:1-14). He tells us to be like Jesus. **Be followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given himself as an offering and a sacrifice to God.**

**Be followers of God!** Obey the Ten Commandments we recited at the beginning of the service; respect our neighbor, tell the truth, avoid immoral behavior. **Walk in love;** love God, love our neighbor. And what did Paul say that Jesus did? He **has given himself as an offering and a sacrifice to God.** Jesus offered and sacrificed his life to God so that our sins can be forgiven.

Being a Christian means we have acknowledged Jesus gave his life for us, so now we are called to offer our lives as a “living sacrifice” to God. Our physical death will not take away anyone’s sins, not even our own. Offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to God means we serve Him by doing our best to encourage

unbelievers to acknowledge his Son as Savior, to have faith in Him. Unbelievers turning to faith in Jesus is what Paul meant when he quoted the prophet Isaiah; **Arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light**; unbelievers are spiritually dead and need to be awakened.

In the beginning of this sermon, I said we may wonder if our effort to do the godly right by living and spreading the gospel message, is futile. We may ask, “What can one person do?”

Many of us lived the chaos and drama of the charges of abuse of power during the Nixon presidency. Chuck Colson was one of those who consequently served time in prison. In his book, “Born Again,” he gives an example of what living with less sin and more love can accomplish.

Chuck had lived pretty much as a Christian in name only, but before he was charged with any crime, a friend led him to true faith and the Holy Spirit began working in him. He came to realize, that while he may not have actually broken any laws, his political actions were wrong. He was well on the path to getting it right when he entered prison.

When he arrived, there were some sparsely attended church services and morale was low among the inmates. When he finally offered himself to God as a living sacrifice, the Holy Spirit took charge of his life. Here are a few results: he and three other inmates began daily prayers and they resolved to say grace before every meal no matter where they sat in the cafeteria, and many others began bowing their heads in prayer. Their prayer group grew and a weekly Bible study developed.

Through their prayers good things began to happen; more inmates received paroles and morale improved drastically. But the greatest of all accomplishments, is that through the personal testimony of Chuck Colson and others, many unbelievers came to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior; even one man who thought he had had committed crimes that God would certainly not forgive.

This is the point of all our self-examination, elimination of sin and doing right while walking in greater love and fellowship

with Jesus. When we live with less sin and demonstrate more love, we are saying to the lost souls, awake and arise from the eternal death of unbelief; allow Jesus Christ to give you the light of eternal life through faith in Him.

Now unto God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all might, majesty, power, dominion, and glory, both now and evermore. Amen.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

**Jesus was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. And it came to pass, as he spake**

**these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.**

#### **Ephesians v. 1-14**

**Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.**

#### **Zechariah 1:1-6, 12-17**

**In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, The Lord hath been sore displeas'd with your fathers. Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord**

**of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us. Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words. So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction. Therefore thus saith the Lord; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.**