

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Our two New Testament readings today could very easily lend themselves to harmful interpretation. The First letter to Timothy charges us to “keep the commandment without spot or blame”¹, which is really impossible for us to achieve. And when we pair this with Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus, it would be easy to extrapolate that if we do not keep the commandment without spot or blame that we may very likely end up in the torment of Hades with the rich man. So let me state clearly – this is not the “good news” that I think we are supposed to find in this week’s readings.

Even so, it isn’t an easy parable to grapple with, especially when we think of Jesus as the one sent to preach God’s word of Love. And so I’d like to share with you an important point that Debie Thomas² makes in her essay about this parable on the website Journey with Jesus. She says that the rich man is not in Hades specifically because he is rich. But instead, because even when he is in Hades he still sees Lazarus not as a human, but as a tool that can be used to bring him comfort and relief. It is not his wealth, but instead his inability to see the human

¹ 1 Timothy 6:14

² <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2374-the-great-chasm>

being before him that causes his torment. She summarizes this by saying “Let us be clear: God is not the one who builds the chasm. We do that all by ourselves”.

Thus, rather than worrying about whether or not we will be in heaven with Lazarus, or in Hades with the rich man. I’d like for us all to consider the places where we have built chasms in our own lives. This may be a little out of the norm, but I encourage you to close your eyes for a minute and think of a place in your life where it is difficult to find love. Maybe this is a person who just irks you, maybe it is around a plan or decision that didn’t go your way, or maybe it has to do with something going on in the broader world. Stop and just sit with it for a moment. As you imagine that person or that idea, that just irks you, take a moment to assess your body. Are you holding your breath? Are any of your muscles tight? Do you feel settled or unsettled? Does your body feel ready to respond in some way or another.

Thank you for humoring me, you may open your eyes.

In our baptismal vows we say that we will strive to love our neighbors as ourselves, but we all know this is much more difficult than it sounds. Thus, these chasms happen between us and others when we forget to see them in the image and likeness of God. And these chasms between us do not just happen in our minds, they work their way into our bodies. So what do we do with these chasms that

leave our bodies tense, or despondent, or ready for a fight? For that, let us turn to our reading from Jeremiah.

Jeremiah is prophesying in a time when King Nebuchadnezzar and the Assyrian armies are quickly taking over the region. Despite the horrors around him that the war with the Assyrians has caused and despite Jeremiah's own captivity in the court of his king, he speaks a word of good news in the form of a business transaction. By telling Jeremiah to buy his cousin Hanamel's field, God offers the good news that land will again be valuable. And so, God says, Jeremiah should buy up the field as his "right of redemption".

Redemption – today we think of redemption as gaining something in exchange for payment. But in Jeremiah's time, "redeemer" was a title that was given to someone to designate a familial role. It was the job of the redeemer to step in for the family when something went wrong. If a family's crops died due to flood or famine, the redeemer would go around to other family members and gather enough food to get the struggling family through the year. If a woman's husband died (as we see in the book of Ruth) it was the redeemer's job to make sure that his widow was cared for, or to find her a new husband. In Jeremiah's case, his role of redeemer is two-fold, since he literally redeems the land of his cousin, providing Hanamel with income and "redeeming" the whole nation with God's promise of a new age.

This role of redeemer is something we still claim since we name Jesus as our Redeemer. In fact, as you listen to Mtr. Leyla speak the Eucharistic prayer in a few moments you will hear her name Jesus as the “Savior and Redeemer of the World”. Thus, Jesus is the one who is set apart to help us when things go awry.

It may be humans that have created the great chasm in the parable, but it is Jesus who has the power to redeem it. We may not be able to cross it, but it is Jesus who can step into it and set it right. I believe that Jesus does this in several ways. First through the Eucharist where Jesus’s own body and blood enter ours to work their redeeming power from the inside out, touching those chasms that we may not even see within ourselves.

And secondly, I think Jesus steps into our chasms and redeems them when we ask him to. Thus, I will encourage you to once again close your eyes and go back to your own chasm. Back to that place where love is so difficult to find. Back to that person you may find so difficult to love. Maybe even imagine yourself with a chasm between you. And in this space, call on Jesus, that he might cross that which seems uncrossable, bringing peace to our souls and our bodies. Ask Jesus to bring that which only a Redeemer might bring.

Let us continue striving to live into our Baptismal covenant, loving our neighbors as ourselves. Knowing that it is only attainable if we live into the response as well: “I will, with God’s help”.