

### **Third Sunday of Lent B - I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."**

March 07, 2021

Time flies, it's already March, a time of late winter in many places, the promise of spring in others. And it is not even midway of Lent. I wonder how many of us think of Lent as a special time in our busy lives. Do we think of it as a time of renewal and reflection? Or do we think of it as a grey time, sort of depressing and cold and sad. Remember the Arctic Vortex few weeks ago. The temperature was down to -25c, felt like -40c up here in Fort McMurray. Even down in Texas, temperature dipped to -13c! Many were without power, heat and water. But in times of miseries, people found joy in snowball fights and tobogganing. While in Hong Kong Spring flowers are blossoming. What's going on? Is God taking a nap? Or does the Lord has a busy schedule like us?

No. God never takes naps. He's always by our side. Yes, always. But just like the Israelites, we are taking spiritual naps in our busy lives drifting away from Him. In the first reading (Ex 20:1-17), we heard God speaking to the Israelites through Moses. ***I am your God, I brought you out of slavery. You shall not make for yourself an idol, .... You shall not bow down to them or worship them.....***". Do we have God foremost in our lives? We are so busy most times, we have no time to focus on God. We have work and family and church...yes, even church sometimes adds to the hectic pace of our days: meetings, decorations, cleaning and sanitizing during this pandemic. How might we change the rat race for the time of Lent. And does our busyness mean that we are putting idols in place of God?

One of the idols for our culture is **materialism**. Almost anything can be purchased if one has sufficient money: goods, influence, medicine, travel, comfort. Our choice is based on our perceived "needs" (It might be better to say "wants"). All these take place in the marketplace. What about the church? Have we turned the church into a commodity to get what we want instead of a holy place for worship and prayer? We sometimes choose a church in this way: Does it have the kind of groups we want, the appropriate services for our children? Are the times convenient for our schedules? Can we go and then get home in time for the Grey Cup or Super Bowl or other important things we have to do? With all these, we sometimes forget that church is to help us keep our priorities straight – to keep God foremost in our lives. It's a place where we gather as a community to celebrate the eucharist and to thank God for His abundant grace.

Another idol is **pride and egoism**. We think we know everything and can fix everything quickly our way. Isn't that so in the world of business and the world of politics? We seem to care only about the short term results. Farmers used to know better. One cannot really rush the weather. We are not smart enough to control the weather. But now giant agribusinesses use chemicals on plants to speed up their maturation. Those who care about the environment, the air, the water, growing things and animals caution us that we may be doing long term harm to the world that sustains us. But we think we have the strength and wisdom to change God's creations and ignore the consequences which we think we can sure fix when they come. But can we? Do we have the wisdom and strength to fix God's creations that we damaged?

Let's look at the New Testament lesson and the Gospel and see if we can find some hope, some way to make our relationship with God better. The Hebrew Scriptures only tell us the law but somehow that law is not enough. In the Gospel (John 2:13-25), the first sentence tells us that it was near the Passover. The Passover is the remembrance of the Jew's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Jesus found that there were people in the temple selling cattle, sheep and doves and money changers seated at their tables. He made a whip of cords and drove them all out of the temple. He said to them, ***Do not make my Father's house a***

**marketplace.**” Those people around him said, “what sign can you show us for doing this?” Presumably they wanted to know what right Jesus had to scold and send away those who sell animals for sacrifice and those who make change. And his response was **destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.**” The temple had been under construction for forty-six years! What could this man mean? But he was speaking of the temple of his body, of his death and resurrection. He’s telling those people to clear out and to keep God in the right place in the temple. And he’s saying that he cares so much that he is willing to die rather than give up his relationship with God. Does this connect with our first reading and our original concern regarding our relationship with God? I begin to think it might.

And if we look at the passage from the second reading (1 Corinthians 1:22-25), we begin to see God’s will. Paul concludes the passage with: **“For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”** What in practical terms might that mean for us? It means that we can come to church with expectant hearts. That we can come and relax into the reality of God’s love. We can confess our shortcomings, we can be fed at God’s table, we can support each other. We can be refreshed and renewed for the week to come. We can be strengthened by our participation in the Eucharist. And we can trust in God’s work in and through us to make us new. Not soon, not quickly, not tomorrow, but in God’s time and in his will.

This phrase, “God’s will,” can easily be misunderstood or used as an excuse to justify questionable personal agendas, whether violent, political, or self-indulgent. But as Christians, we are protected from that kind of error; and know exactly where to go to find God’s will. Christ wants us to avoid sins of anger, arrogance, gossip, lust, greed, laziness, dishonesty... These behaviours damage our friendship with him and cause destruction to those around us. Christ also wants us to develop our God-given talents and opportunities, and to use them to build up society: **“love your neighbour as yourself,”** as he puts it. **“Do to others whatever you would have them do to you”** (Matthew 7:12). That’s God’s Golden Rule for us. And for our part in building this friendship: seek to know and love Christ through prayer; and seek to follow Christ by fulfilling God’s will for our lives. God is all-knowing who looks and prepares ahead for our future. As in Jeremiah 29:11, we are promised, **“I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”**