

February 7, 2021 A Better Way Pt. 4. Hebrews 8:1-13

Dearly Beloved;

Today marks the end of the first week in February and the beginning of the second. Outside my window I can see the cold evidence that there is the most snow on the ground I have seen since the beginning of winter, way back in December. And it is cold. The Polar Vortex has shown up as it does in the winter. There is a breeze so it feels even colder than the thermometer indicates. I will walk outside, as I did yesterday, but I will move as quickly as I can, and I will walk a shorter route, promising myself that I will do it three times to make up the distance. The problem with that promise is when I get back inside the house and feel the warmth provided by central heating.

What I am getting at is this: we have arrived at the heart of our portion of the Canadian winter. The Pandemic has not gone away, and won't any time soon. Please, please, please, do not let your guard down. Wear your mask, especially when you are inside in spaces other than your own home. Wash your hands frequently. Be aware of the distance between yourself and anyone else around. Remember that the variant strains of Covid-19 are much more infectious than the original, which makes the 6 feet apart rule, even more important than it was. Use hand sanitizer when you have been out and touched things and surfaces that are not part of your home turf.

We have all done well to this point. Barbara and I are well, and we are tired of the isolation, but we remind one another every day, it is the best way to keep one another safe,

and it also contributes to the safety of others. It is okey to acknowledge you don't like it. It is also no time to take risks. God bless you as you strive to keep on, keeping on. Keep the faith. And with that I will turn to the message, for which you came to this web site.

Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." In the Letter to the Hebrews we find following Jesus, being a disciple, described as the better way. In the first 4 verses of chapter 1 of this letter, the writer proclaims, having been committed to keeping the Old Testament Law for most of his life, that in Jesus he has seen revealed by God a better way: a better revelation. Verse 19 of chapter 7 tells us that in Jesus we have received the revelation of a better hope. I am tempted to say in the midst of this Pandemic, the best hope there is. I do not mean by that, that medicine and science are not important. When they announce I can get the vaccine, I will do everything in my power to get it as soon as possible. And in spite of the fact that the vaccine will have been the product of human endeavour, I will view it as a gift from God, not only giving me an extra measure of personal safety, but contributing to the safety of everyone I know and meet. But the hope we have in Christ is bigger than a vaccine. The vaccine is for the here and now. The hope we have in Jesus is for eternity. In the 22nd verse of Hebrews 7 we are told by the author that Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant. One of the reasons the New Testament bears that name, is that it is all about the new covenant as opposed to the Old Testament. No surprise, the New Testament tells us about Jesus, who HE is: Lord, Saviour,

Son of God, Son of man. HE is the Messiah, and HE came into our world born of Mary, raised in the household of Joseph, to save us.

This morning we turn to chapter 8:6. “But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs (the High Priests), as the covenant of which HE is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.” Do not for a moment think I am saying we do not need to worry about the well being of our relatives in Israel. We would not understand a fraction of what we do understand and believe, were it not for them. There is a reason the Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets and Hebrew history are bound under the same cover in our one Holy Bible. Without the Old Testament we would not understand the New Testament. The Old Testament prepares the way for the New. It gives us context for the content of the New Testament. And all the promises on which the New Covenant is based are made in the Old Testament.

I have told this story before but it bears repeating. I had a friend in my church in New Liskeard who would ask me, after I had preached from the Old Testament, “Why do you do that. All the good stuff is in the New Testament!” There is an old saying that describes the relationship of the 2 halves of the Bible. The New Testament reveals what is in the Old. And the Old Testament is the rough guardian of the New. Every time we turn to the Old Testament, in order the better to understand the New Testament, we are kept on the straight and narrow path that leads us to God.

Understanding who Jesus is in light of Old Testament teaching, keeps us sound, keeps us grounded in our understanding of who God is, and what HIS will is for us.

To put it in the language of Hebrews 8:6, the new covenant is founded on better, and sometimes overlooked, promises that God made to HIS people. There follows this quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34. It begins by telling us something we know. Something we believe. Something we seek to live by. “The time is coming declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant...it will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers.” Yes, it is a very different covenant, agreement; it is a new deal. A new arrangement. The good stuff in this new arrangement is the emphasis on God’s grace. Once again the initiative was not on the part of the people involved in the arrangement. The Lord God Almighty made this new deal. And it puts people like us in the position where we can never say, I earned it by being really good, or really religious, or even really thoughtful of the needs of others.

In Jeremiah 31, God says, “ I will write my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts.” This new life we receive in Jesus, this rebirth, comes not because of our ability to say what Jesus means to us, rather it comes because we can understand with our heads and feel with our hearts, and yes there is emotion involved, what Jesus has accomplished for us, in us and about us, in offering himself as the sacrificial lamb, to atone for our sinfulness. Now some will

say that takes us off the hook. We no longer have to care about what we do! No, not true. The quotation goes on to say, "I will be their God, and they will be my people....they will know me."

A friend of mine has often embarrassed me, by his attempt to describe me as "not just talking the talk, but walking the walk." It is a very high compliment. One that I am certain I do not live up to. But I do understand, as a friend who has hammered nails with me, and troweled cement with me, and a long time ago, worked with me to earn a living and support my family, what he was trying to express, was that he found me a credible witness, to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Whatever it was that caused him to say those words, it had to do with standards to which I adhered. God's laws written in my mind, written on my heart, such that he believed he could see that I was a real sign of Jesus love, strong enough to redeem. I do not say these things to puff myself up, but to make a point. People can see the Redeemer in us when we work at being a faithful child of God, even when we fail. People can see, the promises of God fulfilled in us...those better promises which are the foundation of the better way.

There is a reason Jesus called his disciples to be a force for light in the midst of the darkness of this world. In hard times we are so aware of our need of that light. As Jesus said to us, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."(Matthew 5:16)

Let us pray;

Lord, God of heaven and earth, we thank you for all that you have brought into our lives through Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. We thank you for moments even in the midst of hard times, when you have permitted us to see your light shining upon us and around us. Help us that we might be of help to others. Strengthen us that we might be servants to those who cross our path. Grant that we might mirror your grace and love so that others might see and praise your name. Amen