

Now is the healing time decreed

I was speaking with a friend recently, when he told me, ‘I love Lent. Lent is a time when you get to throw a whole lot of stuff on to God. You just get it all out. You unburden yourself.’

Now is the healing time decreed
for sins of heart and word and deed,
when we in humble fear record
the wrong that we have done the Lord.

In our Gospel this morning, Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born by the Spirit, if he is to inherit eternal life. In another Gospel, Jesus tells a rich young ruler that he must keep the commandments, if he is to inherit eternal life. The two belong together. The Spirit within us, enables us to fulfil the commandments. Without that Spirit at work within us, we will not inherit eternal life.

Speaking with one of the shopkeepers here in Were Street recently, I was commenting on what a lovely place this is to live and work, and how lovely so many of the people are. ‘Yes,’ he said but then, smiling, went on, ‘but they are terrible gossips.’ I laughed. He wasn’t laughing. It is a serious problem.

The commandment, 'You shall not bear false testimony against your neighbour', has particular meaning. Beyond simply telling the truth, it means 'You shall not spread a false report. You shall not be a malicious witness.'

Not bearing a false testimony against your neighbor, is a natural consequence of the command to 'love your neighbor as yourself'. It is a serious offence against God. According to the Jewish tradition, 'One who bears false witness against one's neighbor commits as serious a sin as if one had borne false witness against God.'

According to tradition, the false witness who acknowledges their sin, and makes the good confession, in a public way, in the presence of the whole community, receives the forgiveness of their sin, and full restoration into the life of the religious community. The false witness who hides their offence, must bear within themselves their sin, and accept the consequences: the punishment they had sought from the person they falsely accused.

In the New Testament, Jesus says that with his coming, the law of God stands. Indeed, to inherit eternal life, one must fulfil the commandments of God. The Christian Church is called to meet a higher moral standard than the world around it. The Christian Church is called to meet the moral standard of the justice of God, as

revealed in the law of God. The justice, the law, the righteous will, of God, that is the light of the world. A light to the nations.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.’

On Easter Sunday, we will, as a Christian community, affirm our baptismal vows:

I turn to Christ.

I repent of my sins.

I reject Satan, and all that is evil.

There is an excellent principle from the world of management that says: ‘begin with the end in mind’. This turning, repenting, rejecting, begins now:

‘Now is the healing time decreed
for sins of heart and word and deed,

when we in humble fear record
the wrong that we have done the Lord.’

Our new life in Christ, beyond this world of sin, begins now. Our
new life in Christ, must now begin:

‘Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or
arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not
irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but
rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes
all things, endures all things. Love never ends...And now faith,
hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is
love.’

Reverend Jonathan Chamberlain

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