

First Sunday of Lent

February 17, 2013

Ashamed No More: God Will Show Us Salvation

Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Romans 10: 8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

This is the first Sunday of Lent.

Lent is a time of introspection.

Often, as the people of God we see the amazing works of God in the world – and just as the Israelites did in the desert – we tend to become grumbly.

And though we may want to chastise them, we discover we recognize ourselves in them.

Lent, in this time of introspection, calls us to become aware of our grumblings, calls us to make time for “ourselves for forty days so we don’t end up wandering around in the wilderness for 40 years” (adapted from: https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_article/458/Original_Meaning_of_Lent.html)

This involves engaging the stories of Jesus and the salvation that comes through Jesus.

Our theme for Lent connects with this as we give attention to our focus of: **Ashamed No More.**

The biblical stories emerge from Eastern cultures where honor and shame are important, – to a degree we as Westerners rarely understand.

Personal, family, community, and national honor of are paramount concern.

To be shamed, to be recognized as less than the image which bestows honor on one’s family and community, destroys people psychologically and spiritually.

Therefore, one may go to extreme lengths, such as lashing out violently against the instrument of shame, to restore one’s honor.

Often in the West our understandings of salvation are rooted in judgment and guilt.

However, throughout Lent, we want to consider the question: how might salvation be understood through the concepts of honor in relation to shame?

In God, through God’s salvation, through Jesus, our shame is removed and honor is bestowed upon us – and we are called to live in this honor, sharing this honor, demonstrating the new life such honor brings in sharing and living out the Good News of God’s Reign in the world
– God’s reign of peace, of hope, of love, of liberation, of shalom and Jubilee.

This understanding of shame and honor is rooted deeply in the biblical understandings of salvation.

Shame is a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior.

We became conscious of how we broke relationship with God in the Garden, and so we hid because we were ashamed.

As Gordon Kaufman has expressed: “Shame is acutely disturbing to the self. In fact, no other affect is more deeply disturbing. Like a wound made from the inside by an unseen hand, shame disrupts the normal functioning of the self” (Kaufman, *Psychology of Shame*, 1989).

And yet God does not act to heap more shame upon us, or even guilt – but acts to set us free (**this is salvation!**)

- Abram and Sarah are shamed by Sarah’s barrenness, seeing it somehow as being disfavored by God, but God removes their shame by giving a son of promise
- The Israelites are shamed by their long period of Egyptian enslavement but are redeemed by God’s rescue in the exodus.
- The loving father is shamed by the prodigal son’s behavior but takes that shame on himself as he runs to embrace him.
- Jesus takes our shame on himself to redeem us to our rightful place; our honor is restored so that we can become fully human, restored to relationship with God and with one another.

The point is that we are empowered through God’s Spirit to live out lifestyles that have been set free from shame and guilt, lifestyles of salvation
– because we have been restored
– not just set free from punishment and guilt (as is our Western understanding of sin), **but restored to honor as God’s people, no longer enslaved by shame.**

We are restored to share the life God has given us;

We are restored to give of ourselves, our lives, our possessions, our passions, our gifts in restoring honor to others;

We live lives of kingdom come, God’s will being done;

We live lives shaped by Jesus’ Jubilee declaration in Luke 4.

We live and share in the abundance that we receive from God daily in our lives.

It is not just about our souls; it is about every aspect of our lives

– **God is at work in us**

– **God is at work in every human life – and so, we are set apart for demonstrating God’s purpose of shalom, in which shame is replaced with honor!**

I believe Romans 10 makes this clear, but not as it is usually read:

– it is not a mere formula that sets us free, it is not saying the right words that gets us right with God

– making the right declaration about Jesus as Lord, and believing that God raised him from the dead.

No, it is discovering and becoming open to the working of God in our lives, of seeing what God is actively doing in us

– and as we become aware of what God is doing in us

– we break forth in praise, we break forth in confession.

The statements in Romans 10 concerning Jesus are to be understood more **as a confession**, similar to the Shema in Hebrew faith: Deuteronomy 6:4 – “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the LORD is one.”

Look at the context:

“The word is near you: it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is the message concerning faith that we proclaim.”

In discovering, in seeing God at work in us – the God who is indeed at work in every human life – in our acknowledging that God has not left us alone, but God has pursued us to set us free, **we respond in confession!**

It is in confessing Christ, our resurrection life in Christ,
– that we find ourselves sharing with others that God purposes to set all people free, **for no one to be shamed any longer.**

Confession is not merely about saying the right things
– **rather it is an expression of what God has been doing in us, in our community in making us new!**

As Terry Shue, director of leadership development MC USA, expresses “Christian formation begins with the stirring of God’s Spirit awakening and inviting us to deeper relationship. The prophet Isaiah understood this when he proclaimed, ‘We are the clay and you are the potter’ (Isa. 64:8). In this journey, God uses all the events of our lives as possible lessons to form us,” shape us (*The Leader*, Spring 2013, p. 9).

Being a follower of Jesus is more than merely confessing Jesus as Lord, and believing he has been raised from the dead.

“If we are to be disciples” whose lives confess and reveal Christ in us, then, “we must find ways to engage the life of Christ and to stick with it for the entirety of our lives (Hess, “Forming Faith through Service, *Leader*, Spring 2013, p. 6).

And so, the reality is: we do not merely speak our confession, we live our confession.

Yet we quickly discover in life, through hardships or circumstances or even opportunity, **we are often tempted to deny this confession, to make another confession.**

And when we find ourselves in such a place, on the brink of stepping back into shame
– we are reminded of Jesus’ temptation (Luke 4) and Satan’s attempt to break relationship between Jesus and his heavenly Father and to bring shame into his life.

In the midst of these temptations, Jesus repeatedly confesses that **God alone is God** by stating
– “people do not live on bread alone” (but by the word of God – Matthew)
– “worship the Lord your God and serve him only”
– “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

Shame comes as the result my breaking of relationship
– either with my wife, my daughters, my friends, my neighbors, with God
– and for each of us, when we live in ways which break relationship
– when we give into some temptation bringing harm to a relationship, **we invite shame into our lives.**

Yet, the good news is: when we are tempted to harm a relationship, **we are not left alone.**

We are called by the Spirit of God to live out our confession: The Lord our God is One; Jesus is Lord, Jesus is the Living, Resurrected Lord in whom our lives hold together, who sets us free, and in whom we have life!”

This Lent, may we discover the depths of God at work in our lives, and then **express it; live it.**

May our lives be a living confession of what God is accomplishing in our world – **replacing shame with shalom!**