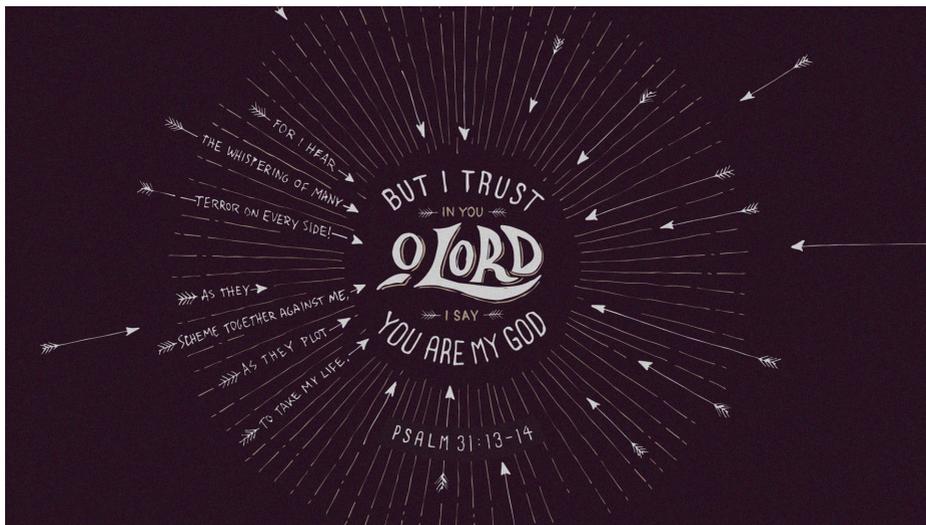


Third Sunday before Lent, February 17th 2019.

Jeremiah 17:5-10



**“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord.”**

Why do you think Adam and Eve were ashamed of their nakedness? The word for ashamed is: *yaw-ray'* – ‘afraid’ in their heart (Gen.3). Because ‘nakedness’ means judgement – they were conscious of their own failings and conscious of others’ weaknesses. The eyes of God and the eyes of others judge piercingly and unmercifully.

Judgment! Today, I’m not preaching “at” you, but preaching “at” myself. If what I say speaks to you, so much the better.

How can you know if you have strayed from what the Lord wills of you? How can I know to what degree I may have turned away? I suggest: take off what I shouldn’t be wearing; take off the filthy rags like the dirty undergarment that Jeremiah was to wear and then hide

in the rocks; take off that which has crept into my life and made me proud. Lay those rags at the Cross of Jesus.

Leave the doctrines and Ideologies of Men at the foot of the Cross – leave my anger, my gossip, my resentment, my laissez-faire attitude about sexual relations at the foot of the Cross. “But my co-workers with think I’m a bigot and a homophobe!” But I am not – to say so is the Ideology of Man. When I take these rags off and find what I am afraid of, I had better only be afraid of our Lord.

Jeremiah tells that the Lord says, “No one is upright” (c.5) – so, again, this sermon isn’t to you, it’s to me. You don’t have to feel ashamed or naked because of my words, I’ve got all the shame and nakedness I can handle, right here.

**“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord.”**

Second \_\_\_\_\_

**“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.”**

In our Bibles, Jeremiah is closely followed by another great prophet: Daniel. Daniel was a young man taken from his home and placed on a much bigger stage in Babylon, bigger than anything he had ever seen. He was a Hebrew, from Jerusalem where his God, Yahweh, had placed His temple and His presence – even so, King Jehoiakim was ‘handed over’ to the army of Nebuchadnezzar.

His faith could have waivered – No doubt, some did waiver in that defeat, but not Daniel, because Daniel was aware of Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning Judah – and now he saw it coming to pass.

Being schooled in Babylon, Daniel was also to read the *Enuma Elish* – the oldest story we have and one that roughly parallels the Creation story in Genesis, but only roughly. It begins with where the gods came

from. As it turns out, they evolved from a pre-historic soup. Like all 'created' gods, the gods of Babylon had a beginning. The primitive gods and their offspring were products of a blind and unguided universe of matter and chance. Yes, modern scientism flowed through Nebuchadnezzar's veins.

But Daniel's God was not from The Soup – he made The Soup! Daniel's faith was built on the likes of Moses and Jeremiah and that little incident in the furnace, but the amazing thing about Daniel was his public and secular success combined with his public and unreserved confidence in his God.

At every turn, without rancor or rudeness, he defied his masters' attempts to wear him down, to desensitize him – Daniel put God, first. As Ravi Zacharias has said, "God is like the sun; I cannot look at Him directly, but it is through Him that I can see everything else."

**"But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him."**

Third \_\_\_\_\_

**"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure."**

We hear a lot about Artificial Intelligence today. I was intrigued to hear what seems to be on the horizon: Autonomous vehicles, Crime & Terrorism prevention, War, and Medicine – including the upgrading of humans.

In his best-selling book "Homo Deus", Yuval Noah Harare asserts something that is widely and practically assumed: "*Death is now a technical problem*", he says, "*It is not that Man won't die, but Man won't have to die.*" We can fix Death. Do you believe him? The CEO of Huawei does. Google has a subsidiary focused on making us immortal called "Calico". Just Google it!

Harare continues in his book: “There will be a great Intensification of the pursuit of happiness.”: “[We can...] *change our biochemistry and re-engineer our bodies and minds .... To do that we shall need to re-engineer Homo Sapiens so that it can enjoy everlasting pleasure... we will now aim to upgrade humans into gods, and turn Homo Sapiens into Homo Deus.*” Do not dismiss this as purely fanciful thinking.

The Rev. Billy Graham gave a talk at a technology conference (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90mj79GqWhc>) when he was 80 years old. The number one issue on his list was: The problem of Human Evil – where does it come from? How do we solve it? David’s Psalms mention it repeatedly, yet he writes “*He restores my soul*”. Evil comes from our hearts – my heart – and only Christ Jesus has a just solution.

**“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.”**

Fourth, and finally \_\_\_\_\_

**“I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.”**

David Berlinski, physicist and author of *The Devil’s Dilemma*:

*“What Hitler did not believe and what Stalin did not believe and what Mao did not believe and what the SS did not believe and what the Gestapo did not believe and what the NKVD did not believe and what the commissars, functionaries, executioners, Nazi doctors, Communist Party intellectuals, Brown Shirts, Black Shirts, gauleiters, and a thousand party hacks did not believe: was that God was watching what they were doing.*

*And as far as we can tell, very few of those carrying out the horrors of the twentieth century worried overmuch that God was watching what they were doing. (Now I want you to listen carefully to what he says)*

*That is, after all, the meaning of a secular society.” x2*

I may be proud of our neatly gardened corner of the world – our tolerance – our secular society, but have I secularized – or more properly – *privatized* my faith as well? Is it like an art collection that I only show to folks who visit the house?

“What if Jesus had privatized his faith?”, but then I reason that God in the Flesh is a mighty high bar. “What if Paul had privatized his faith?” That comes closer to home. – “What if the shepherds at Christ’s birth had just kept it to themselves?”: Now, that comes very close – and “What if the shamed Woman at the Well had privatized her faith.”

Now, there is nowhere for me to hide.

**“I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.”**

Let us pray: ...and there is nowhere to hide, Father, save that holy hiding place of Our Lord, Christ Jesus. Restore our souls – help us follow your light – let us fear nothing, but Your awesome majesty .... May we shed the clothing that does not conform to Your Will and may we dress ourselves with fear and awe and gratefulness and commitment to Your Son, Our Saviour. Amen.