

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
 Third Sunday in Lent
 March 12, 2023
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He that is not with me
 is against me:
 and he that gathereth not with me
 scattereth

The Collect, Epistle and Gospel of today may seem a jumble of unrelated ideas.

Unusual for the Lenten Propers

But there is an important thread that ties them all together
 So let me see if I can shed some light on it.

Since the 4th Century the custom has been that there can be no baptisms during Lent

Lent is a somber time of repentance and introspection
 Of absolution and cleansing
 Of sacrifice

Baptism is a joyous time of celebration of new life
 Wholly inconsistent with Lent
 So Baptism was out,

But, it was a good time for adults seeking baptism
 to study the doctrines of the faith

in order to qualify for baptism on Easter Sunday.

you see, adults then and adults

now must demonstrate an understanding of Christianity
 before they can receive the sacrament of Baptism.

Easter Sunday is not only a celebration of
 Redemption
 Salvation, and
 Resurrection

But is the celebration of new life
 Especially for the dozens of people,
 who were baptized that day
 for the people who had used the Lenten season
 to study and prepare for their baptism.
 And who upon being baptized entered into a new life
 Of Christianity with God.

The Church needed a curriculum for the catechumens
 The people preparing for their baptism
 And scholars combed through St Paul's Epistles
 among the other Church documents
 for the ones that best instructed the catechumens,
 and those Epistles now appear for us during Lent.

The pagan world then,
 much as our secular world today,
 was steeped
 in the laxity of all standards
 but particularly the "lusts of the flesh"
 which is why Paul seems to us to focus on them

The Lenten Epistles
 point out the contrast
 between the ethical standards
 of paganism and those of Christianity.

These Epistles of Paul
 written in the first century
 not long after the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension,
 were what the ancient Christians needed then
 and what we need now
 during Lent
 to help us recognize our failings.
 They are almost an outline for us to use
 to see how we measure up,

To see where we need absolution
and amendment of our lives.
The things we can fix.

One of the constants in the Lenten Epistles,
is the notion
of light.

Lent brings us from the celestially dark days of winter
to the Vernal Equinox shortly before Easter.

Is it coincidence that today marks the change to Daylight Time
As the celestial days lengthen.

So in the days of Lent,
each day has an increasing amount of daylight.

Paul's reference to the light
is born out in our daily lives
as the celestial light of day
increasingly overtakes the darkness of the night.

Paul sets up the theme of "light vs darkness" in today's Epistle
in the same way he did with
the themes of "holiness vs uncleanness"
in last week's epistle.

He mentions the light 5 times in 14 verses today

He writes:

"For ye were sometimes darkness
but now are ye light in the Lord.
Walk as children of light
All things that are reprov'd (or exposed)
are made manifest by the light
For whosoever doth make manifest is light
Awake thou that sleepest and
arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee light."

The light,
 is a metaphor for the Word of God
 The word of God as written in scripture
 The commandments,
 The prophets
 The Epistles of Paul
 Peter
 James, John, and Jude
 The 4 Gospels recounting the story of Jesus, the Christ

The light, the word of God, is our tool in Lent.
 It is the light,
 that we shine
 in the dark recesses of our soul
 to recognize
 and root out
 those sins in our life:
 That which we have done;
 That which we have not done

Sometimes you see the light referred to as a metaphor for “Truth”.
 In the sense that the word of God is true
 And in the sense that knowledge promotes truth
 But also as a bright spotlight of truth
 that can illuminate and eliminate the darkness,
 where the evil resides
 and does its destruction.

The light of knowledge and truth
 once trained upon the evil ones
 and upon their evil deeds
 seemingly consumes them
 in the way that radiation therapy in modern medicine seems
 to consume tumors.

But there is another important sense
 in which we know
 the “Word of God”.

St. John describes it in the opening verses of his Gospel:

*In the beginning was the Word
 And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.
 Jesus is the Word of God.*

So, it is by focusing the “light” upon our souls, even the dark
 recesses of our souls:

Focusing the inner workings of Scripture and Truth
 in our lives
 and by focusing the inner working of Jesus
 in our lives
 that our sins are blotted out of our souls
 and out of our lives.

And that is the work we are doing now during Lent.
 The light is our tool.

Notice the uncompromising nature of the Lenten Epistles.
 Paul points us to light and dark in absolute terms.

When it comes to how to live a Christian Life

There is no nuance
 No negotiation
 No room for exception or for interpretation.

One of the Lenten temptations is to try to bargain with God.

To maybe skip over
 Or redefine a failing
 or maybe to reduce its harm or consequence.

As Paul hints, God will have none of it.

The light shining into darkness
 The light of the word of God
 The light of truth
 bears independent objective
 witness.
 There can be no shade of gray.
 Our behaviour is either sinful or it is not.

Jesus gives us the first of two parables in today's Gospel;
 The first involves a strong man in his palace
 who believes he is protected by his armor
 and the strength of the walls he has erected.
 But a stronger man than he overcomes him.
 The parable is this;
 the "strong man" is the devil,
 placing all his strength and confidence in
 himself.

The stronger man is Jesus, who will overcome the evil one.

The second parable has practical Lenten advice and caution.
 As we succeed in removing our sinful habits,
 In removing the demons that sometimes inhabit our lives
 we leave behind a void.

We need to occupy that space they have vacated
 in our lives
 So that the demons do not return in force
 So that our sinful ways do not re-occur.

We are to re-fill that void
 with behavior
 that would even make St Paul happy.

The Gospel for today contains a number of elements;
 We see that Jesus
 is greater than the forces of evil
 and even before his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension,
 He was already battling the devil and winning.

We can have confidence in Him
 to wage that same battle in our lives.
 He declares that
 “If I, with the finger of God, cast out devils
 —no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.”

The Messianic age is arrived.
 Today’s Collect prays to Almighty God
 To “stretch forth the right hand of His Majesty
 To be our defense
 Against all our enemies.”

In our Lenten battle
 with sin and the devil,
 we call upon Jesus,
 the Christ,
 to be at our shoulder in the fight.

So now, the unifying thread that ties today’s Propers together
 Is laid bare and discernable:

Using the tools of the Lenten Epistles, and the defense
 Of the right hand of His Majesty
 we amend our lives and we follow the scriptures and
 the light, the word and the truth

In time, we become the children of light.

In today’s Gospel Jesus offers this chilling warning:
 “He that is not with me
 is against me:
 and he that gathereth not with me scattereth”.

When it comes to matters of Christian ethics and standards,
there is no middle ground.
We cannot be neutral.
We must choose.

If we are not with Him,
we are against Him.
And if against Him
Without Him
we are scattered
like a scattered flock of sheep,
whose only defense
their union together in numbers
is stripped away
and we will fall prey to the predators.

Our lives will be troubled at times
And our faith challenged

But we are with Him
And He is at our shoulder
In prayer
In meditation and study
In our Lenten discipline
And in the body of Christ,
This little miracle of a church

And in a few moments we join Him
In Holy Communion and in Spiritual Communion

Let the light of Lent
The knowledge of truth
be our beacon
Let us chose to be the Children of Light,
Let us chose Christ Jesus at our side.

