

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
 Third Sunday in Lent  
 March 12, 2023  
 rmcneely+

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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 reproved (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.

