

So how is Lent going for you this year? This is the fifth Sunday and in two weeks it will be Easter. I've been reading a book of meditations for Lent, *A Season for the Spirit*. I've used this book before a couple of times in Lent and it always has something new that speaks to me. Instead of urging the reader to denounce their sins and repent, Martin Smith, the author, urges us to acknowledge our sin – much of which is deeply buried in either righteousness or self-loathing.

Reading both Martin Smith and Psalm 51 at the same time creates what appears to be a contradiction. While Smith urges us to dredge up the demons inside us, Psalm 51 asks God to create a clean heart and to remember our sins no more. And in the bit of Jeremiah Laurie read God promises to forgive our iniquity and remember our sin no more. Is that true? Has God forgotten our sin? Jeremiah is speaking to the people of Israel and Judah, and the sin referred to is their faithlessness in their time in the wilderness, wandering with Moses, creating Golden Calves. This turning from God is what underlies all sin – both the corporate sin of nations and the individual sin of individuals. Has God forgotten our sins?

What connects my Lenten reading with these scriptures is that our main problem is not – has God forgotten our sins, but have we forgotten them? Have we believed in God's forgiveness enough to forget our sins? Or, do we perhaps see ourselves as beyond forgiveness? Or further do we see ourselves as something other than human? And in seeing ourselves through that warped lens, do we shy away from seeing ourselves at all?

Seeing ourselves thus, do we follow our wandering ancestors and fear that God has rejected us? Those to whom Jeremiah is prophesying are among the captives in Babylon. Having been there for generations both the exiles and the ones left behind have doubted God's faithfulness. Now as they are returning, Jeremiah tells them of God's constant presence – in Babylon, in Jerusalem. For both the left behind and the exiled, this had been a confusing time. Urged by God to set down roots in Babylon – it was easy for the exiles to feel that God had rejected them.

Remaining in Jerusalem, those left behind felt abandoned as well – their city in ruins and all the healthy and honorable residents now living in Babylon. God knows how easily the people give up on God, so God once again makes a covenant with the people; one that God hopes will imprint God's faithfulness on their hearts. Had the people, the left behind and the exiled, kept their faith in God their lot might not have changed but living through it might have.

It is easy for the exiled to wonder if they have been abandoned in many senses. There have been times this past year when it's felt like we were the only ones segregated, homebound, punished. When our view of the world has been reduced to what we can see out of our windows, or on TV – convincing evidence of God's presence seems at quite a distance.

It is difficult for the exiled not to doubt God's presence. Once that doubt happens, it is easier and easier for us to begin to think that if God has left us, then we ourselves must act as God. And there you have it, the recipe for sin. At its heart, sin is the product of fear. When we fear that God has left us, has lost patience with us, we seek some other being or state of existence to take God's place. God hates that! How many covenants must God make?

God is actually the only thing that can diminish fear, completely. God's faithfulness lays beneath all the ways we have created false God's to keep us safe. Beneath every stash of gold and cash, God is there. God is there for the moments when we let ourselves know that financial security doesn't banish the fears. Beneath every substance that takes us out of reality for some period of time, there is God. When the effect of the substance wears off and time stretches empty before us, that fear can be banished by trusting in God's faithfulness. While financial security and a glass or two of wine are not ill advised, placing them at the center where God should be is the sin. Not facing your fears opens you to creating pieces of your history that are tucked away from your consciousness and are weighing you down – whether you know it or not.

These bound up pieces of our psyche stand firmly between us and God; as well as between us and other people. Often the deeply buried stuff only needs the light of day to be seen for what it really is – something human. In scripture we spend much time asking God to forget our sins despite God's promise that they are forgotten, and we, who have been forgiven, we cannot forget them. The sins and sorrows that lay deep within us represent our fear – fear that we are somehow not good enough; or the fear of the memories themselves. Perhaps the reason we ask God to forget and blot out our sins is that we cannot; that we are afraid of facing our truth.

Once we bring these sins, these fears, to consciousness; once we open them to God; once we speak them – in prayer, in our heads, to another – once we speak them, we too can make peace with them and allow them to be forgotten, or at the least to lose their charge.

God knows humanity; our anguish, our anxiety, our loving and our leaving. God knows that at the heart of all sin is that while God knows us, we do not

always know God. We do not always know that God is patient, that God has adopted path upon path to get and KEEP our attention, our loyalty; God so wants to give us the gift of a lighter load, of carrying only what we need to.

To enable us to get past this fear, this holding onto our sins, I envision God (some huge hand from heaven) lifting us by our feet and holding us upside down – to shake out every hidden bit of us. To let it lay there, between God and You; to look at it together. To take it in and then to turn and see God, not dwelling on the sins spread out before you, but looking at you with an expression that says, “there, that wasn’t so hard, was it?”