

March 29, 2009
Lent V
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I think it is safe to say that everyone wants to be included, somehow.

This need to be part of something plays itself out in many ways. Some of them are healthier than others.

I don't know if I've told you the story about C.S. Lewis, the writer of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and the *Perelandra* science fiction series, among other things. He was a close and good friend of J. R. R. Tolkien, the man who brought us the world of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. These two giants of British literature were good friends with G.K. Chesterton and Owen Barfield, imminent thinkers and writers in their own right. Each of them had an interest in Christianity and an interest in mythology, epic stories and what I call the great Northern saga. It is reported that at an early time in their developing friendship, Tolkien and Lewis both expressed an interest in these great saga stories, especially Icelandic stories. One supposedly remarked to the other, "What? You, too? I thought I was the only one!" They went on to form a group that loved the myths that played out in the writings later on, a group called the Coal Biters, which is from the Northern mythology of a man who sleeps so close to the fire because of the bitter cold outside that he could reach out and bite the coals in the fire.

Belonging, signs of it everywhere. I saw a group of motorcyclists riding up Highway 101 as I was tooling up to Bishop's Ranch. They were riding together now that weather had cleared and they could dust off the bikes and take a spring ride. They changed lanes from traveling next to me to merging in the lane in front of me. It was an act of grace, dancing, like ballet, this group moving right, following the two lead bikes. It spoke of long association and relationship that they could change lanes so smoothly. Friday, back from the Bishop's Ranch I turned on the television. I saw the rows of motorcycle officers pulling up to the Coliseum for the memorial for the fallen Oakland officers. Lining up the bikes in military precision, taking off the helmets and moving together as a band of brother/sister officers, joined together in this most solemn occasion, it shouted belonging. It was beautiful and painful and I reached for my Kleenex box.

Today's lessons take me to belonging. The relationship with God will move to a new level, according to Jeremiah. We will be so bonded to God that we no longer need the stone tablets of the commandments; we will have them written on our hearts, residing in the deepest place, right down to the cell structure. We won't have to instruct people about knowing God, people will know God. And the covenant forged with Abraham and Sarah and reinforced by Moses on the mountain, will belong to all people, standing together and forgiven. Once God has sandblasted my heart, clearing it of the nicks and stuff I chiseled into it, removing the graffiti that has collected there, then God has a place to write these things, with a gentle hand, onto the heart.

The Hebrews text is a connector between Jewish culture and Christian culture. The author is trying to make the historical bridge of Judaism and this individual called Melchizedek. A shadowy figure at best, this high priest was said to be a contemporary of Abraham's, or possibly one of the sons of Noah. There are rabbis over history who have declared this high priest as someone worthy of note, as his name surely signifies, King of Righteousness, from the words Melek, meaning King and Tzaddick, meaning holy and righteous. In this case, however, it is Jesus of Nazareth who is this high priest, one who takes a giant step. He isn't offering sacrifices at the altar of God, he IS the sacrifice, without blemish. That is why the term Lamb of God is so powerful. Jesus belongs to the order of Melchizedek and stands as an ultimate sacrifice so that all can belong to him.

In today's Gospel lesson, there is an interesting interchange between two disciples and some Greeks who were coming to Jerusalem. There was a group called the God-fearers who were not Jews but they came to Jerusalem for the Passover and were involved in the rituals there. The names Philip and Andrew were Greek names, so maybe the Greek God-fearers who had come to Jerusalem were introduced to them and felt a kinship or a bond to these two. Hesitant to contact Jesus directly, they seek an introduction to this teacher and these two disciples act as the connection and approach Jesus. They want to be on Jesus' appointment calendar.

This request seems to be a sign for Jesus. Instead of saying, "Yes, I'll see them." Or "No, send them away." Jesus said IT WAS TIME. We have heard Jesus tell his disciples that the time isn't right, don't tell people what you have seen and heard, a lot of instruction about "No, not yet." and don't say things, keep your opinions to

yourself. Over and over again there is this great secret to be kept. But now, at this time and place, Jesus announces it is time.

The Gospel of John doesn't have a Transfiguration story, this is the closest thing to it. The immediacy is borne on the word NOW.

This is the last Sunday in Lent. Next week is the Sunday of the Passion of Christ, which includes his final entry into Jerusalem. The non-Jew has approached Jesus through his disciples and the die is cast, the story breaks open, the stage is set for the great dramatic climax at Passover.

For those of us who belong to the Christian faith, there are lessons for us in today's readings.

The prophet promises the law of God will find a way in, all the way to our hearts. And God will do the writing there.

The epistle writer said Jesus' prayers and supplications were heard, and his willing obedience and sacrifice were and are the source of our salvation.

The Gospel writer brings together the outsiders with the insiders. The two disciples were not shocked at being approached by the Greeks. Jesus said, in response, that he would draw all people to himself.

Moved by God, living obedient and sacrificial lives, being welcomed by Jesus ourselves, welcoming all who are drawn by Jesus, these are the marks of our discipleship and the highest goal we could set before ourselves in observing a Holy Lent.