

Lent 4: Our Whole Life a Gift from God

It is said that when the sculptor Michelangelo was asked, “How did you sculpt the Statue of David?”

He replied: “I simply chipped away everything that wasn’t David.”

And for this season of Lent I’m doing something similar. I’m chipping away at our ideas about the Creator/Creation relationship, until all that remains is the “New Covenant” that the Prophet Jeremiah writes about, the New Covenant we Christians describe as God’s relationship with the world, established by God through Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

I’ll be chipping away by saying what God’s covenant is **not**, so that we can see what God’s covenant **is**.

In the first three weeks, I let you all know that:

1. -God’s Covenant is not a weapon of war, but the proclamation of peace.
2. -God’s Covenant is not exclusionary rules, but trust permeated by hope.
3. -God’s Covenant is not *Diktats* to the Enslaved, but Freedom in Community.

And today I’ll be preaching on the subject:

-God’s Covenant is not Wages for Human Work, but Our Whole Life, a Gift from God.

Then next week I'll put it all together by insisting that:

-God's Covenant is not a fragile, scattered, shattered relationship, but continually being drawn into internalized, intentional, renewed relationship.

Let us pray

God's Covenant is not Wages for Human Work, but Our Whole Life, a Gift from God.

There are all kinds of stories we tell about ourselves and about God... and they have consequences.

Sometimes we see ourselves as employees of heaven —we do the will of God, and God gives us our just payment—our wages.

We tell the tale of "up religion."

That life, is a sort of ladder and that the goal is the storming of heaven —or perhaps just getting there by and by.

We take our cues from how much of the world around us works, and sing an if/then song.

"If I do X, Y, or Z, then God will surely love me!"

Or perhaps we understand the faith as a behavior management program

—I take my child to church so he'll behave, this is where we learn morals.

But all these metaphors for the divine human relationship start off on the wrong foot,

they make the assumption that the faith is all about us... when it's all about Jes-us.

Our faith in Jesus, not Jesus' faithfulness.

When Righteousness belly button gazes, it becomes self-righteousness... And self-righteousness is the enemy of love.

There is a reason Paul is always warning about Boasting, If you boast, you need to be better than someone else —need to put yourself ahead of another, either by pushing yourself beyond your own capacity, or by tripping other people up... putting them on pedestals and then chipping away at the base.

As religious story teller Brene Brown writes, *"Self-righteousness starts with the belief that I'm better than other people and it always ends with me being my very worst and thinking, I'm not enough."*

Yes, Up religion and If/Then thinking,

they leads to inflated expectations and broken relationships...

Thank God **God's Covenant is not Wages for Human Work, but Our Whole Life, a Gift from God.**

Up religion is wrong religion —if we study our scriptures you'll notice God is always coming down

Jacob doesn't climb up his famed ladder,

angels come down.

The up oriented heaven
storming tower of Babel falls,
but the Holy Spirit falling upon
the people at Pentecost was a
celebrated event.

John's Gospel continually
affirms that the invisible God
made Visible comes down,
so that we might be lifted up,
drawn into relationship with the
God who meets us in Jesus Christ.

If/Then ain't our song,
ours is a Because/Therefore
melody
—*Because God loves the world,*
therefore he gave his son,
because he gave his son,
therefore we may have eternal
life!

For some people, the
Christian faith as a moral program
(finally a little control in an
uncontrollable world) feels like
hope... *until it doesn't*. That's just
asking for religious burn-out, or
sky high hypocrisy.

Ongoing self-improvement
isn't a matter of will-power,
otherwise everyone would be
angels.

Real change tends to come
through the depths of despair
—hitting rock bottom,
or by being struck by love,
that holy aha!
Aha! I'm loved... what do I get to
do now?

That's not our doing
—that's the Spirit at work!

This gift from God, that we read about in Ephesians, is something beyond morality, it is about mortality—our whole life, saved all the way through, a way of life—a disposition of awe! Life lived in response to God’s grace.

As Luther writes:
*“God receives none but those who are forsaken,
 restores health to none but those who are sick,
 gives sight to none but the blind,
 and life to none but the dead.
 He does not give saintliness to any but sinners,
 nor wisdom to any but fools.
 In short: He has mercy on none but the wretched
 and gives grace to none but those who are in disgrace.”*

In some ways *I’m lucky*, I have a really solid personal experience of what it means that all of this is a gift from God! I have a story truly close to my heart to remind myself (*and believe me there are plenty of times where I have to remind myself*), a story that reminds me of God’s goodness and mercy.

When I was first born, I turned blue. It turned out I had a hole between two of the chambers of my heart, and the main valve wasn’t working right, (not too long ago this was a death sentence). So they needed to operate, and beforehand, my parents handed me over to a chaplain to baptize me, just in case.

Just in case, turned, for me,
into something amazing.

I received an experience of radical
grace,
my whole life a gift,
just as the doctors fixing my heart
and saving my life is a gift.

I get to live a life in response
to God's goodness,
assured that God is loving, I can
love.

I get to live into the life of the
Spirit given to me that day 40
some years ago.

And not only that,
there is a whole community
dedicated to just such a life, the
Church, the Body of Christ.

I am, on account of my baptism, a
member of the body of Christ!

I thank God for that chain-
smoking chaplain my parents

passed their little blue newborn
to.

I thank God for both the physical
and spiritual life I've received, sort
of in tandem,

baptism and surgery,
both immeasurably precious gifts.

I thank God for each day I get to
live, in light of grace and through
the power of the Spirit.

I thank God that I have a
community of faith, born out of
this baptized life,
living into it together as best we
all can.

**God's Covenant is not Wages for
Human Work, but Our Whole
Life, a Gift from God.**

Thanks be to God! Amen.

