

# **Sermon for Sunday, March 29, 2009**

## **Fifth Sunday in Lent**

**By Tim Ljunggren**

**First Lesson            Jeremiah 31:31-34**

**Psalm                    51:1-13**

**Second Lesson        Hebrews 5:5-10**

**Gospel                    John 12:20-33**

In today's lessons, we are all offered the heart of Lent—we are called to hear that heartbeat and to allow it to become the centering rhythm of our own lives.

In our first lesson for this morning, the prophet Jeremiah looked to a time when the heartbeat would be written within, by means of what he called a new covenant known by all the Israelites without reference to our benefit of priesthood. Each person would know the law within and would be able to live in resonance with it—no need for priests in such a time as this. The people would be living in the time of fulfillment.

This time of fulfillment is now, Jesus said, and the dominion of God is at hand. In the coming of the Christ, we see the fulfillment of that hope of a new covenant for which Jeremiah lived and breathed. Christ is the one priest, according to the Hebrews, in whose sacrifice we know the highest, deepest meaning of priesthood. Christ knew the pain and suffering and nevertheless was obedient until the end. Christ is given the crown of life through the resurrection. By his obedience he becomes the high priest for us all, and now he intercedes before the throne of God on our behalf.

This is the language of divine poetry; we can have a difficult time understanding it. The language draws a picture for us, a picture that points to something far greater than ourselves.

Here, then, is the mystery of our faith: What's the reason that obedience is the ground of resurrection? Here's one answer: In obedience, the self we invent as our own is dismantled and discarded so that the true self can emerge before God and be sanctified. But this true being—this true self—is not ours to determine; it comes only from God, it's a gift and not a construction, and it's a character and

not a feeling. In obedience, the self we invent is put aside so that a new self may be given to us, a self truer than any truth we can speak ourselves, a self spoken into being by God.

Obedience takes care of our own notion of who we are and puts us where we can hear another word which defines and says “yes” to our life. In obedience, we hear the call of God to a life of service and caring, in which the old self that we constantly create is forever discarded behind us, a new self rising out of the Lenten ashes like a Phoenix.

We need to see ourselves as part of a larger body than we normally do to understand the Lenten way. The need for sacrifice arises from our living in a culture and a society that’s just now beginning to recognize any limitations whatsoever; we are beginning to see that our materialistic approach to life only leads to destruction.

The disciplines of Lent are one means for us to enter into obedience. When we relinquish our hunger for excess, when we redistribute our funds to the poor and the outcast and the oppressed, when we redirect our whole lives to God through prayer and meditation, we are put in a place where we can learn the inner secret of Lent—that inner secret is that in dying we live.

To speak of offering in prayer and thanksgiving brings us to the baptismal font, where we were offered up in order that we might become servants of Christ, stewards of God’s mysterious creation, and caretakers of one another. Prayer and thanksgiving bring us to this table set with bread and wine, signs of Christ’s love poured out for us in order that we might be in turn poured out for others. At this table, we are invited to offer up one another in prayer and in thanksgiving.

This, then, is the true message of Lent—the notion that we, through the sacrifice of Christ, can live into our own ministries with abandon and grace.

The walk is almost over...

Amen.