

**Sermon: 2019/03/10 (1st Sunday in Lent) - Deuteronomy 26:1-11;
Psalm 91:1-2,9-16; Romans 10:8b-13; & Luke 4:1-13_BTR**

('...if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.' [Rom. 10:9])

What special season is it?

[Wait for response.]

Right!

Lent.

And in "Lent" we are - traditionally - expected to *do* something;
to prepare ourselves for the fun and indulgence of Easter;
to *do* something to *show* our love for Jesus.

Some people *do* extra Bible-reading.

Some people *do* a pilgrimage - a difficult journey on foot to a holy place like Jerusalem or Santiago.

Some people *do* fasting - give up a meal or chocolate or wine.

Some people *do* special charitable outreach to the poor.

Some people *do* more evangelism - and put more effort into inviting others to Church.

Some people do an extra early service of Rite I.

And *doing* these things is great!

But when you've given up something you really like Lent can feel like a *long* time:
forty days!

And, if we're honest with ourselves, all of our lives - every moment should be lived like it is Lent, which is a very daunting thought indeed.

And that's because being faithful to Jesus; being a disciple *is* hard.

So, why bother?

Why "keep" Lent?

And why be a disciple?

(It'd be easier not to!)

Well, it only makes sense if we *believe*.

What, exactly?

Saint Paul reminds us this morning: '*believe* in your heart' that 'Jesus is Lord' - *the boss*.

The boss of bosses.

And, 'that God [has] raised Him from the dead'.

If both these ideas are true, then, as some of us will be saying later in the "Nicene Creed",

'[Jesus] will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead' - and being obedient and good is the only way to be ready.

But why?

Why do you believe what you believe?

For so many, (if they still go to Church that is), their beliefs are merely those that they inherited from their parents or grandparents - like blue eyes or curly hair.

They are "adopted" unconsciously; not chosen.

Like your (preferred) denomination.

Like the language you probably speak.

Or the place that you call, "home."

So that being a "Christian" is somehow just the default setting for a person of your color, age and nationality.

Just a "given."

Not to be questioned.

But, more and more, this isn't the case.

People move much more than they used to - usually from the place of their birth to "the big city;" even from one continent to another.

The Randalls are a case in point.

You know, judging by a CNN article I read this week, the scale of attempted immigration at the southern border is comparable to the Huns' invasion of the Roman empire in the fourth century.^[n.1]

The numbers are staggering: more than the population of some European states such as Luxembourg arrive every year.^[n.2]

Men and women, you see, just aren't "tied" down by the traditional "anchors" as they once were.

The lure of an imagined better life elsewhere; of new, unexplored opportunities is magnetic for new generations much more than it is intimidating.

People (already) within this society, it seems - especially, of course, millennials and "Gen. X-ers" - are challenging and overturning convention and culture at a frighteningly accelerated pace.

And so we - "the religious" - are required and expected to justify our beliefs like never before.

And if, when, "put on the spot," our answer is:

"Oh, because I've always thought this way."

"Oh, I was brought up to just accept these things."

- "things" like the Incarnation or the Resurrection - which, to "outsiders," must sound *absurd* - that response won't "cut it."

It won't "fly."

And is certainly not attractive.

Why should I tolerate your strange beliefs, especially if they seem to me prejudicial - let alone (why should I) *share* them - if *you* only cleve to them because that's how you were raised in this particular time and place?

In Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the hero is washed ashore from a shipwreck on the Island of Lilliput, which is at war with its neighbor, Belfuscu - and why? Because they disagree as to how breakfast should be eaten, one of the kingdoms having *deviated* from the 'primitive way of breaking eggs...upon the larger end'.[\[n. 3\]](#)

And, to skeptics, to thoughtlessly abide by one's family's religion or ideology seems equally ludicrous.

It is like the Greek philosopher Socrates said: "The unexamined life is not worth living."[\[n.4\]](#)

And there's a lot of truth in that statement.

Though it isn't the Gospel.

So, if only to please Saint Peter - who taught us to '[a]lways be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks...for the hope that you have' [\[3:15\]](#) - we must *intentionally* reflect on - that is, *study*; familiarise ourselves with - the *objective* foundations for Christianity; on those knowable causes of its existence.

Which brings us to our Old Testament reading from *Deuteronomy*:

Moses, leader of the Jewish people - the descendants of Abraham - is with them in 'the Wilderness', but looking ahead to their reconquering of Canaan - the land that God had set aside for them - and we hear him describing what they should do when they finally triumph.

And he says to them, "When the Land is yours;

when the land has been pacified and you've finally put away your weapons of war - when you've "beaten your swords into plowshares, and the spears into pruning hooks"[\[Is. 2:4\]](#);

when you've cultivated the ground, cleared the trees and gathered in your first harvest, *then* you are to take 'some of the first of all the fruit' and go up to the tent housing the Ark of the Covenant" - the Temple won't be built for many centuries yet - "and give your 'basket...to the priest' for him to make a burnt offering of it to 'the Lord'.

And as you do this very momentous thing" - and this bit is key - "tell him" - the priest - "that 'I have this bounty to give because God kept His promises; because even though my people were once nomadic, "dirt poor," barbarous 'Aramean[s]' from a distant land, 'few in numbers', slaves, etcetera, etcetera, He [\[point up\]](#) performed a series of miracles - 'with a terrifying display of power' - and 'brought us into this place'."

In other words, Moses counsels his people to deliberately memorize; to

deliberately commit to their "hearts" their *improbable* true-story.
Because it is by this unique, unparalleled story that they would be transformed,
and they would be known by others.

By the story.

The story of Abraham's call.

The story of Sarah's pregnancy in her old age.

The story of Jacob

And Esau.

And Joseph.

And Sinai.

And Joshua.

And on and on.

And Jesus!

This series of stupendous episodes is so wonderful that it *will* cause doubt;
incredulity in those who weren't there;
in those whose own personal history - and this is all of us - is, in comparison,
mediocre and pedestrian.

And so unbelievers will scoff and laugh.

But "the truth will out."

Because it really happened.

So, don't modify the story.

Don't be embarrassed by the story.

Don't make excuses for the story.

Just tell it.

It is winsome unlike any other.

All other good stories - *Star Wars*, *Jurassic Park*, *The Notebook* - whatever! - are,
in the end, only pale imitations of it.

And the world is an incomprehensible, ungovernable mess without this story.

Remember, therefore, that many have "tested," like the Devil, Jesus, this story -
the claims of the Bible.

They did from the beginning.

It always had its detractors and its critics.

And it has weathered them all.

And if the Church seems in trouble now *in America*, in this moment, this is a
problem that the Church brought on itself by a loss of confidence in its incredible
story.

By a loss of confidence in a *real* Savior who could have commanded (inanimate)
stones to turn themselves into bread.

But that is exactly the kind of Savior we all need.

Let's take a moment to reflect.

Footnotes:

1. See: Kelly, Christopher (2009), *The End of Empire: Attila the Hun and the Fall of Rome*, New York, N. Y.: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 49. And compare with: Alvarez, Priscilla (6th of March, 2019), 'DHS Secretary Nielsen Defends the Administration's Immigration Policies in Contentious Hearing', *CNN*, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/06/politics/nielsen-immigration-hearing/index.html>, (accessed March 8, 2019).
2. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luxembourg>
3. (1844), Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 75.
4. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_unexamined_life_is_not_worth_living