

**Sermon: 2019/03/17 (2nd Sunday in Lent) - Genesis 15:1-12,17-18;  
Psalm 27:1-10; Philippians 3:17-4:1; & Luke 13:31-35\_BTR**

[Invite children to the front.]

Do you know what a "nemesis" is?  
Anybody?

[Wait for response.]

*Right!*

A "nemesis" is someone that is *always* out to get you;  
like your opposite.

Superman has Lex Luther.

Captain America has the Red Skull.

Wiley Coyote has road-runner.

- We often popularly imagine that, in the "Animal Kingdom," certain *types* of  
animals have nemeses, don't we?

Give me an example:

[E.g. Dogs vs. cats.

Wolves vs. sheep - or three-little-pigs!]

What about foxes and chickens?

They're *famous* enemies, aren't they?

If chickens have nightmares, it's probably of foxes breaking into the coop.

Which is interesting because, today, Jesus calls Himself 'a hen' and King Herod a  
'fox'.

But what we know about Herod - and this isn't the one who tried to kill the baby-  
Jesus at Christmas; this is his son (who had the same name) - is that he wasn't  
very interested in religious controversy - he 'feared' getting involved, [Mk. 6:20]  
and didn't oppose the Church or her messiah in any (obvious) way: in fact,  
when Jesus was sent to Herod during His trial for blasphemy (before the  
Crucifixion), for example, the king actually 'was very glad' to meet Him: [Lk. 23:8].

So *why*, do *you* think, would Jesus suggest that Herod might be His nemesis?  
(As opposed to the Pharisees.)

Let me help:

What made Herod Jesus' "nemesis" - His opposite - was *who* he was (rather than  
anything that he actually did):

Which is to say, Herod was rich, married - multiple times(!), a murderer, irreverent, and a narcissist.

Jesus, on the other hand, was *none* of these things.

And He was suspicious of anyone who was.

Let's pray: Father God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ask children to leave.]

I'm sure that you've all heard the "Headlines" coming "thick n' fast" out of New Zealand: a quiet, quaint, pretty, little country - famous for sheep, rugby, Peter Jackson and *very* little else is now a by-word for xenophobia and terrorism. [n.1]

The young shooter - he's not even my age - is almost a cliché(!):

At first, he seems to fit the FBI's profile for such evil lunacy perfectly - an angry white, male loner.

But despite the various lazy labels being "slapped" on him by the Media, none seem to really fit - not *exactly*:

to say that he was a 'right-wing extremist' - as some have claimed, is reductionist, over-simplistic.

It obscures the reality of what he actually claims in his manifesto, which can be read online. (Conveniently, he posted it along with a video of his attack on Facebook.)

Indeed, in terms of ideology it is very hard to say why he did what he did: in that 74 page document he expresses his admiration for the Communistic, one-party system in China and ambivalence about President Trump, a supposed "fellow-traveler." [n.2]

So, what can we say?

(In the light of such horror.)

Well, I've said before and I'll say it again:

"The world is a mess"

- And we are *all* the reason why.

Our species.

Our nature.

Our "condition."

The "*human* condition."

You might call this the third, over-arching foundational truth articulated by the authors of the Holy Bible.

The first being that creation has a creator.

And the second that He made it "pregnant" with potential - beautiful and otherwise.

And this "Trinity" of tenets - all to be found in the very first pages of *Genesis* - is the background; the "bedrock" on which all that follows in the Bible - *and in history* - must be interpreted.

If, then, we've caused the universe - in our little corner, at least - to go "off the rails" - if we've "hijacked" and diverted God's design, how do we respond?

What must we *do*?

Let me tell you:

We "must" look to God and His leadership.

He must act before we can.

He is, after all, the *first* cause - and everything else merely an effect.

He must act to set the tone, the *direction*.

And He has done so.

And He didn't wait around, prevaricating; biting His nails.

God is *astonishingly*, reassuringly sensitive, attentive - *alert* - to the needs and plight of His creatures.

Thus, following *the* (primordial) disaster, which is "The Fall" (in Eden).

Immediately, "Plan B" - the Flood - "kicks in."

And when humanity - in the shape of a drunken, despondent Noah and his sons and their families - prove to be as much a part of the problem as the solution, God again "leaps into action" - like a captain on a sailing-ship in stormy waters: repeatedly, *graciously* He allows a delegate - a deputy - to take the wheel in steering the boat, but He is always "hovering" near by to grab it;

to set the course once more;

to re-point the vessel on the best trajectory,

the one between the sharp rocks of over-indulgence and abject poverty;

between belligerence and cowardice, and so on.

And away from the "whirlpools" of 'destruction', 'shame' and 'the belly'. [Phil. 3:19]

(Those are all terms borrowed from our *Philippians* reading.)

And if one was following along in the Scriptures, this (divine intervention) only ever takes just a few verses - God's attention, you see, despite the fact of His being the Lord of a vast and complex Universe, doesn't ever wander from each individual person; it never wanes.

He is always, *rigidly* focused on your personal, unique best-interest - in this life and for the next.

Yet in His enormous, expansive love He must continually balance our needs with those of everyone - and *everything* - else around.

And so although He has no favourites He also elects some to shoulder the burden and privilege of holiness ahead of others.

Which brings us, of course, to Abraham.

The reading we heard isn't, of course, the beginning of their relationship - though

it sounds like it.

No, this takes place in Canaan, the land that God had sent Abraham to find.

Picture it.

Picture the moment as it is described.

This bizarre, *brutal* ritual.

It deserves an R-rating:

Stinking, steaming carcasses lying on the ground having been cut into halves;  
vultures attempting to steal away some of the offal;  
blood everywhere.

This is how God made a pact with an old, childless Iraqi man from a family of moon-worshippers - a pact of good fortune for Abraham in return for his faithfulness; his *trust*.

A pact - *a new start* - made with violence.

(Objectively, right?

Not just in the view of P.E.T.A)

With a brutal sacrifice.

And if this scene doesn't remind you of Christ's crucifixion on Good Friday, you're not paying close enough attention: the fundamental similarity - *and fundamental significance* - of both these episodes is stark and undeniable:

Notice, for instance, that the critical moment - the sealing of the Covenant by the ghostly, unnerving appearance of 'a flaming torch' (held by an invisible hand) that passes over the dead offerings - in the Old Testament happens 'when the sun had gone down', [Gen. 15:17] *and*, in the gospels, Jesus' death occurs - and I quote, from *Luke* [23:45] - 'while the sun's light failed'.

These patterns aren't coincidences.

God is predictable.

And He means for us to appreciate that fact about Him - to *rely* on it; to see that sacrifice - off-putting and dissuasive in the short-run - brings wonderful goods in the long-term.

Like 'a land flowing with milk and honey'.

Like life after death disciples.

Keep this in mind this Lent as you make the traditional "sacrifices" expected by the season; to persevere; to do more and, perhaps, go farther.

Let's take a moment to reflect.

Footnotes:

1. See, for example: Alexander, Harriet (16th of March, 2019), 'New Zealand Shooting: Brenton Tarrant Charged After 49 Killed in Attacks on Two Mosques in Christchurch - Latest News', *The Daily Telegraph*, available at <https://news.yahoo.com/zealand-police-respond-reports-mosque-021932832.html> (accessed March 15, 2019).
2. Bawer, Bruce (15th of March, 2019), 'Don't Exploit Christchurch: The New Zealand Massacre was an Act of Pure Evil, but it should not Serve as an Excuse to Silence Frank Discussion about Islam and Mass Immigration', *City Journal*, available at [https://www.city-journal.org/new-zealand-massacre?utm\\_source=City+Journal+Update&utm\\_campaign=9fc68af1a3-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2019\\_03\\_15\\_03\\_45&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_6c08930f2b-9fc68af1a3-109331049](https://www.city-journal.org/new-zealand-massacre?utm_source=City+Journal+Update&utm_campaign=9fc68af1a3-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_03_15_03_45&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_6c08930f2b-9fc68af1a3-109331049) (accessed March 15, 2019).