

Yom Kippur was this week. It's the most sacred day in the Jewish year: the day of atonement. It is a day of fasting, introspection, repentance ~ in many ways, our practices of Good Friday are reflected in the practices of this holiday. (Yes, this all has a point... bear with me a moment.)

As I was reading up on Yom Kippur, I discovered that the observances around this holy day remind observant Jewish believers of four things:

1. God's children are not sinners in the eyes of Heaven but human beings created in the image of God who have fallen short of their great potential.
2. The children of God are capable of changing their lives when they reject self-righteousness; when they honestly and with humility examine their ways.
3. It is never too late.
4. It is later than we think. God's people do not know what will happen to them tomorrow; each day could be their last.

I'm not typically a supporter of cultural or spiritual appropriation, but I think as Christians, as the people of God whose heritage is steeped and rooted in the Jewish faith and traditions, these four convictions ring true for us as well.

1. We, too, fail to live up to our abilities and miss many of the opportunities to enrich our lives with purpose and meaning.
2. Christians also ascribe to the conviction that while everyone makes mistakes, we have the ability to examine our lives, adopt new ways, and become the people we were created to be.
3. We also believe it is never too late: the faithful can always start life again, improve our actions, and live the kind of lives that uplift, inspire, and are a blessing to others.
4. As for the notion that it is later than we think, the faithful of Israel are better at sensing an urgency to live in alignment with their faith than I perceive many Christians. On the whole, I think Christians (in our culture anyway) tend to forget to 'carpe diem' – seize the day. I think we lean a bit heavily on the notion that God will meet us more than halfway without necessitating our effort to lean in at least as much.

This morning, we are celebrating an Easter liturgy as we baptize baby Pete Morse (at the 10:30 service). However, as with any Easter liturgy, there is an inherent

expectation that we are to put forth the energy, time and effort to do the work that brings about new life, reconciliation, and restoration.

The new beginnings, the new life, the wholeness that God offers *is* worth the effort! When we lean in and align ourselves to God's desire for us, we open up the possibility that God's kingdom on earth will be more reflective of God's kingdom as it is in heaven: where mercy is incarnated, justice achieved, and the whole created order lives in harmony and balance.

Tonight is the beginning of the seven days of Sukkot (*soo-koht*), the days that are set aside to give thanks for the harvest as commanded in the Book of Exodus¹, *and also* the days when those faithful Jews who could make pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem would do so as instructed in the Book of Leviticus². These two practices are significant because to give thanks for the harvest is to acknowledge the change of seasons, to enter into a deeper trust that God will provide during the lean months of winter. Likewise, to make the trek to the Temple in Jerusalem, was to leave behind family, friends, a livelihood, making the faith-filled journey toward what they believed to be the heart of God.

In light of both of these observances regarding Sukkot, to get there, to be able to trust in God's provision and approach God on God's own terms, one must let go. We must let go of pride and hubris that our lives are just about us. Let go of the hurts that restrict our perspectives and harden our hearts. Let go of the prejudices and hypocrisies that limit our vision of what could be. Let go of the guilt that holds us back and weighs us down. Let go of the illusion that anything is in our control. Let go of the expectation that the long, warm days of our spiritual summers will last forever ... The seasons of our faith life come and go just like the seasons of the created order.

The lean months of winter inevitably come, but we *can* trust in God's provision. We can store our harvest as best we can ... (we can tell the stories of how God has always provided for God's people throughout time; we can feed ourselves on Word and Sacrament, nourishing ourselves on God's provision; we can join in fellowship and spiritual community to reinforce the layers of love and care and support that God intends for us to enjoy and rely on) ... so the winters aren't quite so cold, and not quite so lean.

¹ Exodus 34:22

² Leviticus 23:42-43

In a few minutes, we will have an opportunity to renew our covenant with God, to recommit ourselves to the work of the Gospel, to start fresh. The time to change and improve who we are and who we want to be is now. We have an opportunity to start over and try again, as though it were our very first effort, but with the benefit of hindsight and experience.

As we recommit ourselves to God in Christ, may we keep in mind:

1. We are not sinners in the eyes of Heaven but human beings created in the image of God who have fallen short of our great potential.
2. We are capable of changing our lives when we reject self-righteousness; when we honestly and with humility examine our ways.
3. It is never too late.
4. It is later than we think. We do not know what will happen to us tomorrow; each day could be our last.

The Psalmist tells us that God is ever mindful of *God's* covenant with *us*.³ It is only with God's help that we can be mindful of *our* covenant with *God*. It is only with God's help and grace that we can let go and fall into God's embrace. It is only with God's help that we get to live and move and have our being in right relationship with God and one another.

There's a fancy ancient Greek word to describe the fullness of the liturgical actions we'll be taking by renewing our covenant with God: *anamnesis*. It means to remember ~ but to remember in such a way as to re-live the original event as though we are participating in that past event in the here and now, alongside all the others who have '*anamnesised*' that event in the past, or ever will *anamnesis* the event in the future.

We will *anamnesis* our baptismal covenant-making with all who ever received the sacrament of baptism before us, all who will be receiving it today, and all who will ever receive it in the future. We get to *anamnesis* our covenant within the context of that huge spiritual community, with all the saints and sinners who have walked this earth before us, with the early church fathers and mothers, and with Jesus and John in the River Jordan. We get to join together and *anamnesis* our baptism, re-experiencing it anew, with all its benefits and responsibilities, with all its challenges and blessings, and be restored in the fullness and perfection of God's holy image.

³ Psalm 111:5b

If that weren't enough, a few minutes after that, we get to *anamnesis*, (re-live, re-experience) the Last Supper as we break bread with one another, giving thanks *once again*, with the communion of saints and our ancestors in the faith, with Jesus and his 12 original disciples. As though it were happening for the very first time. We get to be fed with bread and wine, with the Body and Blood, with the Paschal Lamb whose living sacrifice was for you, and for me, and for each and every one of us.

And today we are blessed that baby Pete gets to join in all of that with us. Thanks be to God!