

Why not think a bit about consequences?

I've never been good at maths, chemistry, physics. I just didn't understand the internal logic, and none of my teachers at school helped. But I used to have a good memory, so at exam times it was easier to study formulae off by heart than to try and "understand" them. I always joked that I became a minister because the only numbers were those of the Book of Numbers, and not many people read that one! □

But over the years, I have become fascinated by astronomy, the universe, and have tried to grasp something about all that. I admit I don't fully understand it all, but I admire what it tries to help us grasp of realities much, much larger than what we see. And then I have realised how some laws of physics apply to human behaviour. **Have I lost you already? Bear with me a moment and I will come explain what I mean.**

One of the most important theological concepts, at least from our Reformed tradition, is that of Covenant. But do we really grasp what it means, what it involves? To start with, it's a way on how we 'organize' the Bible: The Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The characteristic of a Covenant is that it is initiated by one of the parts and involves two sides, and though it can go through rough times, there is a sense of long-time connection. God remains faithful to the Covenant even when the people of God seem to renege from it. A covenant is different from a contract, where any party can disband a contract, while a covenant tends to perpetuate.

God establishes a Covenant with the people at the time Moses delivers the tablets on Mount Horeb. And at the Last Supper, Jesus speaks of the New Covenant sealed in his blood. And this NEW covenant can be explained because of the breakdown of relationships over the years. So yes, Covenant does explain who we are on the journey of faith, and we do well to remember this.

Now let me take a step back and take you for a few seconds to an advanced physics moment. And we turn to Newton for this, his Third Law of Motion, published in 1687, and it basically states that ***for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction***. In simple terms, throw a ball against a wall and it will bounce back, the stronger the throwing the stronger the bounce back. And this is what goes on with the Covenant.

God set out the terms: the words on the tablets which we reflected on not a couple of weeks ago, or Jesus' summary of the law, which we have mentioned various times – love God and love your neighbour. It's there, set out for all people to live a fulfilling life, so why is that fulfilling life not happening? Because we push back against the covenant, we do things against it, we become selfish, we reject God's love, we keep for ourselves what is meant to be for all. I don't mean this only on the personal level, but also on the institutional level, the social dynamics, the environmental reality.

So, let us turn to the Bible readings and think a bit about consequences to actions. This week I have been horrified by some of the decisions taken in our political world, particularly as we define ourselves as a Christian country, built on Christian values: the right of protest is being criminalized, the lives of women are valued less than statues, we have reduced the aid to countries like Yemen and Syria, we have agreed to sell arms to countries that attack and bomb their poorer neighbours, we have agreed to increase the nuclear budget, even when the leaders of our churches had signed a letter to denounce this. What then will the consequences be, for those who support this, for the victims of all this, for the world? How can this be supported as Christian? How does any of all this live up to the Covenant God makes with the people?

The short reading from Jeremiah is a reminder that God wants to offer us something new, because clearly the old ways have not worked out too well: "they broke the covenant". It will no longer be on tablets of stone but on hearts and minds. And if we continue our previous Reflections, it will be the teachings of a new social order, where the welfare of others is central. The people may have turned away, but God continues active

reaffirming God's intentions: "I will be your God, you will be my people" – **that doesn't change**. People that forget their past are condemned to repeat it, and clearly this is leading us to think about the consequences of what we do/do not do; what we say/ do not say.

And let's take a look at what happens in the Gospel reading. It all happens when some people from the Gentile world (here, Greeks) want to meet Jesus, I can only imagine they are intrigued with what has just gone on (the noisy entry of Jesus to Jerusalem). And Jesus responds with the announcement of his imminent death, **but it is a call to life**, and it is an invitation to each of us to engage in this conversation on life. This is the consequence of following Jesus' way and teachings; it is the consequence of not putting ourselves first. What shape does entering into the covenant relationship, which God has created take in our lives.

Jesus says that all this is the reason why he has come, to open up a new way of life. He again refers to being 'lifted up' as we mentioned last week. And please, please bear in mind, Jesus is not saying we have to hate ourselves, rather it means putting God's will before ours, and living that way, this is the centre of it all. So, let us think of the Covenant relationship we have been grafted into, and think of the consequences of doing either one thing or another. Our actions will produce a re-action and let us pray that those action/reactions are in the light of God's love for all.

Look at the scales:



Whatever we place on one side of the scales will have a direct effect on the other side. The same happens with how we live life, and the consequences for our relationship with God, with ourselves, with others and with the environment.

We are children of the NEW covenant made real to us in Jesus, and this is where we are on this journey of Lent as it draws to a close, and a new time opens ahead.

Collect for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

Lord of the new covenant, in Christ you draw all people to yourself: may we die with him to the powers of hate and let him show us a world loved by you. Through Jesus Christ, the fruitful grain. Amen.

(Prayers for an inclusive church)

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