

Genesis 45: 3-11

Psalm 37: 1-12, 41-42

I Corinthians 15: 35-38, 42-50

St. Luke 6: 27-38

Epiphany VII 2022.

---

“The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”

I Corinthians 15: 45

In the last 2000 years or so, the relationship between Jewish and Christian believers has been uneven – and sometimes, terrible... Christianity emerged out of the Jewish faith environment. In the first century, Jews would sometimes persecute the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, but it didn't take long for the persecution to be reversed... For all the debt that we owe to the early Christian writers, what those Church Fathers sometimes wrote about their Jewish forebearers is disturbing to read... One of the kinder examples is from Aristides, a defender of Christianity in the second century:

[The Jews] proved stubborn and ungrateful [...] when the Son of God was pleased to come upon the earth, they received him with wanton violence [...] And they perished by their own transgression...

These are Church leaders who pour out so much *hate*!... This hate is from our spiritual forebearers from long ago, who proclaim to follow Jesus, himself a Jewish rabbi – he who insisted on a new relationship with one another marked by radical love to everyone...

In fairness, anti-Semitic thoughts and writing toward the Jewish people has diminished in the Church over the centuries... Some of us might be interested to learn that the original prayer for the Jews in the Common Prayer Book has been changed. The Lord Jesus is still upheld as the Christ for all people, but the tone is far more gracious, and emphasizes our common ancestry in Abraham...

It's not easy to admit, but there has been this pervasive anti-Jewish language by many Christians over the years. That's had an effect on how we read the Bible – especially, the Old Testament...

For centuries, many Christians have said, the whole Bible points us to Jesus Christ. They say, When Jewish people read the Hebrew scriptures, the Old Testament, they really misunderstand the entire text, because they don't see Jesus in it...

Understandably, Jewish believers object strongly. “What do you mean, we fundamentally misunderstand the text? It's our sacred literature! It's nourished us for thousands of years! What arrogance!...” They have a point!... We can acknowledge that the Hebrew scriptures have been life-giving to Jewish believers – including those times when they have been persecuted by Christians...

Somewhat in reaction to this, some Christians try to avoid the Old Testament altogether... “It’s just a bunch of wars, not about the God of love,” they may say. Surely, however, that approach is equally unfaithful: Jesus Christ himself understood the Hebrew scriptures has inspired by God, and authoritative for the life of himself and his people. To ignore or to dismiss the Old Testament is about as bad as those who spew poison against Jewish believers...

While I have much to be grateful for from the parish where I grew up, I can’t remember *any* teaching about our relationship with the Jews or the Old Testament – not *one* example... The role of the Jewish nation in God’s covenant relationship was never, ever mentioned...

I propose a gracious middle way: We can affirm that the Hebrew scriptures are nurturing to Jewish believers, *and* we can also affirm that the Old Testament points ahead toward Jesus Christ (in some sense, God’s work in Jesus Christ is already present in the Old Testament)...

Here’s an example: When God’s people were wandering in the wilderness, they got fed up with Moses their leader because they were hungry and thirsty. They began to complain – we need to guard against complaining, don’t we?... Annoyed with God and annoyed with the people, Moses raps a nearby rock sharply with his staff – and then to everyone’s astonishment, water gushes out, and the people’s thirst is quenched! (Exodus 17: 6)... That story in itself is significant... But the early Christians added another layer: In a sense, the Rock itself is Jesus Christ, who nourishes us in profound ways... St. Paul writes, “For [the Jewish people] drank from the same supernatural Rock... and the Rock was Christ... (I Corinthians 10: 4)”

So we can be gracious to other points of view, while insisting on the centrality of Jesus Christ, the Son of God...

This play between the Old and New Testaments shows up in today’s second reading, from First Corinthians 15. In chapter 15, Paul takes some time to teach about the resurrection. As part of this teaching, Paul contrasts “Adam” and “Jesus Christ”...

Adam, we recall, is identified as the first man in the Old Testament. Adam and Eve together ate the forbidden fruit and were banished from intimacy with God. In a very real sense, we are all sons of Adam and daughters of Eve...

Paul explains that first comes natural life, then comes spiritual life. To use Jesus’ metaphor, we are all born, but then we are born anew, as we begin our spiritual walks with Christ Jesus... Paul sometimes calls Jesus “the last Adam” or “the new Adam...”

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam [that is, Christ] became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man [again, Jesus Christ] is from heaven. As was the man of dust [remember, God formed Adam from dust], so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. (I Corinthians 15: 42-48)

Paul's contrasting the Old Testament and the New, between Adam (who represents physical life) and Christ (who brings spiritual life)... We are grateful for life. How much more can we be grateful for our new lives, in Christ...

Keeping in mind the dangers of the human heart to condemn our Jewish forebearers, let's notice in today's gospel reading that the way of the Lord Jesus is the way of radical love...

'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also...

It's not easy to love our enemies. But for Christians, love is a choice, an exercise of the will. We are to love everyone, without reservation!..

The second example in today's reading is, we are called to radical generosity:

From anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

We are called to radical generosity, not to hoard or to be selfish...

The Lord Jesus also teaches, we are not to judge, nor to be judgmental. (God is the Judge, not us):

'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

We live in a season in which some Christians seem inclined to judge hastily. We need to stand up to what we believe to be faithful to Christ – but our lives ought to be marked with generosity, humility, and radical love...

May we appreciate the New *and Old* Testaments, and all they reveal. May we appreciate the tradition of the Church, while we assess the Church against the standards of the gospel... May we shine with the love of Christ, to live for him, to whom belong all honour and glory; world without end.

Amen.