

Sermon for the 4th Sunday in Lent—Refreshment Sunday

Today's collect and readings from Scripture are wonderful lessons for recalling our baptismal covenant. From the collect of the day, we are called to be the body of Christ, the true bread which gives life to the world as He lives in us and we in him.

In Paul's second letter to the Church in Corinth, he calls the baptized a new creation and entrusts to us the ministry of reconciliation. Thus we are ambassadors of Christ's reconciling love for us that forgives all of our sins and gives to us this ministry to be through Him the righteousness of God.

As recorded in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells us what this ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation looks like in response to the grumbling of the religious leaders that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. In the parable of the father's unconditional love for the "lost son," Jesus spells out what unconditional love looks like. How does our love today as Christ's hands and feet in the world look like in comparison?

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in a new book written with his daughter called "*made for goodness and what that really matters*" describes what it means to be "kept in being by the very breath of God." As the parable for today illustrates, there is not a single person the God gives up on, "because (as Tutu says) we are made to be like God, who is goodness itself.

Tutu goes on to say: "This is not only a faith claim. It is a scientific fact. Science testifies that goodness is a survival strategy. God create us to depend on each other for our very lives." (As we respond to support Veronica and Carmen in their live in Christ, we affirm our responsibility to do so for them.) As primatologist Frans de Wall explains, "We belong to the category of animals known among zoologists as 'obligatory gregarious', meaning that we have no option but to stick together. This is why fear of ostracism lurks in the corners of every human mind: being expelled is the worst thing that can befall us. It was so in biblical times, and it remains so today. Evolution has instilled a need to belong and to feel accepted. We are social to our core."

Tutu reminds us today that: "The impulse to care, the instinct for goodness is a shining thread woven into the fabric of our being. As human beings we may tarnish the sheen or rend the fabric of our own goodness. We can act in cruel and heartless ways. But because we are human, we cannot completely rip out and destroy every vestige of the godliness by which and for which we were made. We cannot alter our essence. We are made by God, who is goodness itself. We are made like God. We are made for goodness....

We strive endlessly to 'be good' or to 'do good' instead of realizing that 'we are good'....Goodness is not the coin with which we anxiously pay for God's love. Our goodness is, rather, the recognition we offer and the thanks we return for the gifts and the love already given us."

As Julian of Norwich, the 14th century mystic wrote: “And I saw full certainly in this and in all the showings that before God made us, He loved us and this love has never slackened nor ever shall be.”

As Tutu says, “Perfect love is not an emotion. It is not how we feel. It is what we do. Perfect love is action that is not wrapped up in self-regard, and it has no concern with the deserving. Instead, perfect love is love poured out. It is self-offering made out of the joy of giving. It requires no prompting. It seeks no response and no reward. God’s love is perfect because God always and only performs acts of love.”

This morning we will welcome Veronica and Carmen into the household of God. By our love, they will come to know what it means to be part of the Body of Christ in whom we live and move and have our being in perfect love.