

“Losing It”

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 4:13-25;
Mark 8:31-38

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I'm losing it. Ever said those words? It could be something as simple as going to the parking lot and opening the door and starting to get in and realizing "it's not my car!" Generally, however, it's usually more than that. I realized that when I feel like I'm losing it, there's something else going on. It usually has to do with something like a change or loss of a job or economic circumstances, a change in health status or a change in relationships, leads me to a place where I feel like I'm losing it. So I wonder what is it, it's not every change that makes me feel like I'm losing it. Perhaps an instance for me this year was this fall recognizing that my daughters and David were gone and that Ames was growing up and I was feeling so different. The relationships I've defined my life around had changed. The daughters gone; my role was changing. I was a little disoriented. Indeed it seems when those relationships or those circumstances around which we define ourselves change that there's that real sense of disorientation. So as I was thinking about the changes that come about and the ways we feel disoriented, I was thinking "how do I get re-orientated?" What is it the orientation that my life might need? Well I can't think about disorientation and orientation without thinking a little bit about God.

After all we think about God as the creator or the universe, incredible power and strength. And then as we began to think about that, it's a little hard for me not to wonder, to think that humans may respond to all that power with some fear. The Noah covenant which we talked about last week, I think, is an encouragement to say that God does not want to destroy us but indeed, especially if you listen to first Peter from last week, God was patient and wanted to save. Maybe, then, I can think about this God a little bit more. We have the Abrahamic covenant today where God comes to Abraham. Not only does God not want to destroy God's people, God wants to be part of God's people's lives, encourage us, promising Abraham that his progeny would live, promising him that they would become great nations. The only problem I have with that is the translation of *nations*. Today, we have a particular image of what a nation is. I doubt if that was what it was for Abraham. He didn't have an image of the United States or the countries in Europe or all the different nations around the world. And really the word translated as *nations* really means *living body*. And so what God was offering was to have a continuance of life in a body, a community, a family. So God's promise was that through relationship with God, we would be formed into a body - a living body - a family of faith, great "nations".

Now as we look at this, we notice that God isn't just saying, "This time I'm not going to destroy;" he says "I want to be in relationship" and it actually says, "and here's a little bit of actually how we're going to do that." Now when he says "walk blamelessly before me" that makes me pretty nervous because you know what, I don't think I can do that. I'm not blameless! Of course, we have Jesus now so we have some sense of how we deal with that. But blameless isn't there in the original Hebrew. What it says is to just to be turned toward God, to walk turned toward God, and when they did the Greek version, there's where the blameless show us. Well maybe that was their understanding, that when we walked turned toward God we are blameless. After all, that seems to be similar to what Paul was saying in Romans. "It's not about the law," Paul

says, "It's about the trust in God." It seems like the same kind of thing. That it is our trust in God that allows us to turn toward God, and walk with God, to be in that relationship with God. To be reckoned righteous is the way Paul says it. And I would argue that that means that through our trust in God, our relationship with God is right. That's what righteousness is. And out of that grows the idea of right action.

That all sounds really nice, really easy, until I hear the conversation between Jesus and Peter and I begin to realize that it's not always quite that easy for me to stay trusting God. Here Jesus is talking to Peter and telling him what is going to happen to him because of his trust in God. That the religious authorities and the civil authorities are going to arrest him and put him to death and then he'll rise again (but Peter doesn't seem to hear that part of it). Peter focuses on what's going to happen. And Peter says, "No, it doesn't need to happen. After all, we can do both—trust God and satisfy the authority. And Jesus says no. That's the temptation to try and live in both worlds. Jesus says, "Peter, you're putting your mind on human, not divine things."

So often in my life I notice how I begin to orient my life and it really begins to be oriented around human things and now and then I get that shock and begin to realize it. In some ways, Lent is the time that invites us to look at how our lives are oriented, what's important, what is guiding us. Well one way we can look at the idea of what is guiding us is to look at what our "shoulds" are. I was having a conversation about "shoulds" with somebody this week and there was this kind of sense where we shouldn't have any "shoulds." Well, I don't agree, I think we do have shoulds. The problem is when we have shoulds that are impossible to fulfill. So that's one kind of should that's hard, that's impossible. But the other kind of should that we do struggle with is what I call the "unexamined should". So I'm living out of my shoulds but I've never looked at why I might do something. We can do something as easily as put somebody down because I just think of that as a should, they're that way because I've always seen things that way. But when I'm confronted with Jesus asking me to see with different eyes, to see first that it's not all about me - which is a tendency I think humans have to make everything about us - and define ourselves with all our relationships and things, and Jesus says, "It's first about God. God loves you." That could be a little disorienting right there. But then, He encourages us to recognize that we are called to love one another. And as I begin to look at the shoulds in my life, I can see a variety of times where they are really like auto-pilot, that aren't that helpful at times and lead me in ways that in fact, don't show God's grace, and interfere with my experience of God's grace and block my reaching out to others in love.

Now what Jesus says here is that in examining our lives and recognizing how we often hold on to human things, we may have to lose it, to feel disoriented, but He promises that there is another side to that as we come to God, as we follow Christ. So that is what Lent is in a way; it's an invitation to be disoriented and then to recognize that by that disorientation we are able to let go of the empty, the partial, so that we might turn to the one who gives us what is full, gives us real life, eternal life, the resurrected life. The invitation to the disorientation is an invitation to the mystery of God, the wonder of grace, that we might find the life God offers. Amen.