

For Me: today's psalms and lesson(s) have a common and familiar theme: forgiveness and life prevail over anger and death. While God gives us free will, God's hope is that we'll choose the path to life and not death.

In the lesson from Hosea, that Susan read, Hosea's marriage to a prostitute symbolizes Israel's relationship to God. Israel had been married to God since the pact God made through Moses at Sinai. Israel is described as a prostitute by forsaking this bond. God's first response toward the house of Israel is anger and death when He says "you are not my people and I am not your God." Later, He shows forgiveness saying "In the place where it was said to them you are not my people, it shall be said to them, Children of the living God." God has compassion and does not desert His people. After bearing him three children, Hosea's wife forsakes him; but, Hosea takes her back-analogous to God's redeeming love.

In the alternative reading from the Book of Genesis, not chosen as today's Old Testament lesson, God tells Abraham that He is going to Deal with the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah. Ultimately, however, He tells Abraham that for the sake of ten righteous He will spare them. Again forgiveness and life prevail over anger and death.

In our psalm for today we hear about God speaking peace (or life) to his faithful people and salvation to those who fear Him-(life again).

In today's epistle Paul warns the Colossians to accept the truth of the gospel as they've received it and to be on guard against philosophical beliefs which are of human (not divine) origin-a path leading to darkness and not light. In addition he reminds them of when they were "dead" in trespasses God made them "alive" through forgiveness, erasing the record against them by nailing it to the cross.

The Good News for man has always been that God is in the forgiveness and life business; not the anger and death business. It's up to man to choose the path that leads to life versus a path toward darkness.

Although, I've always liked to think of myself as a person with a tendency toward forgiveness, I think God wanted to teach me more about this idea when He called me to my current occupation of dispensing nurse at a Methadone Clinic.

When I repeatedly see drug addicts, who more often than not, choose the path that leads to death; that is, the path back to drugs instead of the more difficult and righteous path to life and recovery, I can certainly empathize with God. Watching these patients of mine, I see God's frustration with all men. Nonetheless, I can also understand how easy it is to fall away from grace when we succumb to the lure of the Evil One and the world. I should know-I've done it!

When we allow ourselves to stray away from the flock of Christ; that fellowship and community which are His Church, we are an easy target for the lure of sin. This fact is surely manifested by the lost souls I encounter at the Methadone Clinic. I struggle daily not to judge them for I need to remember instead to love and forgive as God has forgiven me-not an easy task.

Nevertheless, when I strive to fulfill my Baptismal Covenant by seeking Christ in all persons, this task, (or at least the ability not to pass judgement) becomes easier. When the disciples asked Jesus, "how many times must we forgive?" His response was 70 X 7. Well, I've had at least that many opportunities and I think I can still use more practice. I'll probably get it, though, considering where I work.

Somehow, I think God is using me as an example for the patients at the Methadone clinic by showing what He can do to change a life, like He's done with mine. Being involved with a faith community such as St. Peter's has made all the difference in my life. When I stopped attending church on a regular basis I saw myself falling back into ways of the world and sin.

By giving to and loving each other we are choosing the path towards life-the Light of Christ. But, when we choose to adhere only to selfish desires we are more than likely going to head down a path that leads to sorrow and darkness.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he explains how God's love has been poured into our hearts through The Holy Spirit that has been given to us. By staying close to our faith community at St. Peter's, by seeking those things above where Christ is, by adhering to the principles of our Baptismal Covenant of seeking Christ in all persons, and loving our neighbors we illuminate Christ and the Holy Spirit in ourselves.

I've even been told by several of my patients that they have noticed some of that light shining in me. I pray that in so doing they will be motivated to Seek and then Find, Knock and the Door be opened for them, Ask and the path to the Light of The Holy Spirit given to them.

Let us pray: "O blessed Lord, you ministered to all who came to you. Look with compassion upon all who through addiction have lost their health and freedom. Restore to them the assurance of your unfailing mercy. Remove from them the fears that beset them; strengthen them in the work of their recovery; and to those who care for them, give patient understanding and persevering love. Amen.