

Passion Sunday (2023)

How many of you remember your first computer?

More than likely, it was a clunky thing with a large tower that sat on the floor and a monster monitor which took up most of the desktop.

More than that, it probably didn't have much memory and was incredibly slow by today's standards.

Our first computer here at St. Luke's came in 1995. When we got on the internet, you could go and get a cup of coffee while you waited for a site to load.

At least in the beginning, we didn't care. It was all new and exciting technology.

I don't want to demean those early computers. They served their purpose.

But, *how much more* do those we have today? The difference between the former and what we have now is night and day. No one in his right mind would want to go back.

The same could be said of the New Covenant in relation to the Old Covenant in the Bible.

Just in case you are not up on your covenants, the old was the one made at Mt. Sinai. It was initiated by God, with Moses being the mediator or in-between man.

In this covenant, God laid down how He wanted His freed-from-slavery people, those who had left Egypt, to live over against the nations around them.

Also included in this covenant were instructions about how they were to approach God and have their sins dealt with.

The system put in place at that time involved at least three things: a tabernacle, a priesthood, and animal sacrifices.

Link that picture with the old computer I have just described. The Old Covenant was good, but nowhere as good as the one that was to come, the one brought in by Jesus, the new better Moses.

Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says:

“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

The key phrase here is “how much more”.

As it turned out, the old operating system – the Old Covenant -- was a preview, an advanced sign, of something yet to come . . . something that would be far better.

We have been thinking about computers. Think now about cars. You might not be aware that before a new body design comes off the assembly line, a clay model car is made. This step allows the body design to be seen before the actual car with an engine is produced.

In some sense, that was what the tabernacle and later the Temple did. It offered a sneak view of what was to come and set the stage for it.

As impressive as a clay model car may look, it would be a very foolish thing for someone to go back to it once the actual cars were in the showrooms and on the street. Why? The second – the real car -- is better and is where the clay car was pointing.

And yet ‘going back’ was what some of those being addressed in today’s passage – Jewish Christians -- were thinking about doing. They were thinking about going back to Judaism. Why?

First, some background. A new wave of persecution against Christians was underway.

Judaism from which they had come out, meanwhile, remained a recognized and tolerated religion within the Roman Empire. Christianity, at the time, was not.

Therefore, some Jewish Christians were tittering on the edge of returning to their former faith and the practices enjoined under the Old Covenant.

To these, the writer of Hebrews says: “Don’t do it! Stand firm in the Gospel of Christ!”

Why? Because the Temple and the system of animals sacrifices prescribed under the Old Covenant was a silly and not a God-given thing?
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No! It was because that something better had come. That which had been prefigured and anticipated under the old order had now arrived.

In times past, the Temple, in particular the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies, was the place where the living God was strangely present with His people.

But now Jesus was the place heaven and earth overlapped. He was the new, better Temple, a building not made with hands.

If the Temple – the building – had been rendered redundant by the coming of Jesus, so had animal sacrifices.

On the cross, Jesus had offered the one perfect sacrifice, Himself. Animal sacrifices were no longer needed, just as flashlight is no longer needed when the sun comes up.

Down through the years much ink has been spent on trying to explain how this transaction took place . . . how the price of sin was paid, how the gap between sinful man and a holy God was bridged.

None of these explanations has been completely satisfactory. An element of mystery remains. In the end we have to say with Harry Webb Farrington's hymn:

**I know not how that Calvary's cross
A world from sin could free;
I only know its matchless love
Has brought God's love to me.**

Going back to this morning's passage, the central message is: Jesus is incomparable. The

old account has been settled once and for all.
The new is superior to the old.

The estrangement that began with Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden is over.

If you have tasted of God's new creation in Jesus the Messiah, carry on to the finish line, regardless the cost. It will be worth it all when you hear the pronouncement:

**"Well done, thy good and faithful servant.
Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."**

What I have said thus far may sound far away from anything we experience today. After all, few of us are actively thinking about going back to Judaism . . . primarily because we were never there in the first place.

Yet, if you think about it, there is a message in Hebrews for us all. We may not be thinking about going back to Judaism or off to any other

religion, but there is always the danger of getting so caught up in the things that people in our materialistic age get caught up in that we take our focus off those things that are eternal.

There is a danger of returning to a de facto paganism.

No doubt you can think of people, perhaps members of your own family, who have done just that. They have a Christian heritage and upbringing. Perhaps at one time they were active in their local church. Yet they have fallen away.

Going back can be costly. When the trials of life come, as they come to every one of us, their resources for dealing with them are meager at best.

More than that, Christianity is always one generation away from extinction. The Gospel must be passed on.

When it does not happen, not only are individuals affected, but society at large. That is what we see happening around us today in this country. We are back in the jungle.

The blessings we do enjoy have come to us because of the faithfulness of those in the past. But we can't live off this spiritual inheritance forever. As an extinct star continues to give light for a season, so the benefits of the Gospel continue for a time. That light, however, will not always shine. Eventually, all goes dark, as things spiritual are eclipsed by things material.

Let me be clear, though. Material things are good. They are ours to use and enjoy. But they must be kept in their rightful place. We mustn't let them eclipse the things of eternity, those things that will be around once all our treasured toys on earth have turned to rust and dust.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be

added unto you,” says Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

As I close, let me ask: Who or what is on first in your life? Are you going forward or backward in terms of spiritual maturity? There can be no standing still. You are either doing one or the other.

One greater than Moses is come. Stick with Him and keep moving ahead.