

Easter 3, Year B
April 19, 2015
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
The Revd. Shari Young, Preacher

My dad, who was a writer among other things, used to have a three volume set called Master Plots which I used when I was in middle and high school. I like to know plots and summaries in short hand. when I hear a reference to Antigone or Our Town I like to be able to look it up. In college, it was Cliff Notes, currently I have the Readers Encyclopedia on my bookshelf and of course the internet makes all of that moot.

The last three sentences are that kind of summary. The entire bible, and New Testament in three sentences

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you-- that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

This is the starting point of the apostles understanding about Jesus, and the source for their preaching which explodes forth in power in the Book of Acts.

Jesus is the Messiah, he suffered and was raised from the dead and the vocation of his disciples, of us, is to proclaim repentance and forgiveness. Reconciliation with God and others. Now repentance and forgiveness points to sin.

Usually we think of sin as breaking the moral law; sinning against other humans---having an affair, stealing, lying, being mean etc. These are external, they reflect our inner state. Sin is not about moral law it is about our inner most relationship with God.

Sin is not about immorality....lying, cheating, deceiving, stealing.... it is rather about estrangement. Sin is not necessarily our actions or thoughts; our outer self, it has to do with our innermost being. Are we acting out of disorder and imbalance? Are we fully the beings of wholeness and love that we are meant to be?

Last Tuesday was the 150th anniversary of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. He among other things, has left us an example of noteworthy reconciliation.

When Lincoln was campaigning for the presidency, one of his opponents was Edwin McMasters Stanton. For some reason Stanton hated Lincoln and degraded and belittled Lincoln throughout the campaign, including comments about his appearance and bitter diatribes about his character and conduct.

Nevertheless, Lincoln was elected 16th president of the United States. Much to everyone's surprise, when the time came to select his cabinet, Lincoln chose Edwin McMasters Stanton for the all important post of Secretary of War. When asked Lincoln about his choice of the man who had belittled and degraded him, Lincoln simply said "In looking over the nation, I find he is the best man for the job"

At Lincoln's funeral, Stanton called Lincoln one of the greatest men who had ever lived, and is the one who said "He now belongs to the ages."

In choosing Stanton Lincoln had acted with full and transparent integrity and values of love and forgiveness which radiated from his deepest self.

David Brooks, the New York Times columnist, and News Hour pundit has just released a book called the Road to Character. describing his search for greater generosity of spirit and depth of character. He has a memorable turn of phrase for virtue. He talks about the "resume virtues and the eulogy virtues." The resume virtues are the skills you bring to the marketplace, and the eulogy virtues are the ones talked about at your funeral.

We are a society which focuses on the resume virtues; we are always looking up the pyramid at external achievement and glory. We tend to value people by their resume virtues. Brooks' realization is that what truly satisfies are what he calls the eulogy virtues; the virtues which radiate from a focus on generosity, gratitude, compassion, patience, excellence, and service.

These virtues come from our inner most being, the place where we are reconciled with a compassionate, merciful God. The focus of our faith is not on sin but on redemption. The important work is the daily overcoming of our sins through grace, and more importantly the daily resurrection to new hope, and new possibility.

John in his letter says that we are children of God because of the love God has given us. We are children of God and have this love because we are forgiven, and because we forgive others.