

Sacred Actions For Holy Living: Reconciliation & Renewal

Bible Reading:

2 Chronicles 7: 12-18

2 Corinthians 5: 11 - 6:2

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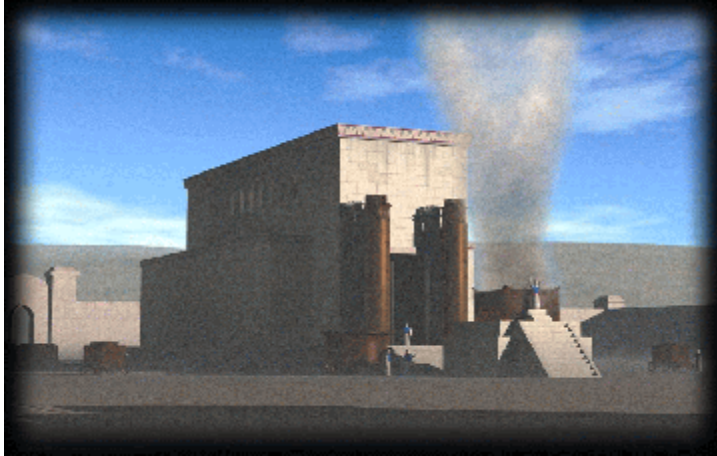
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF OTTAWA

ONTARIO, CANADA

I want to take you on a journey back in time.

We're going to a date somewhere around 970BC. Solomon is king of Israel. He has just finished construction on his masterpiece -

the Temple of the Lord.



Based on biblical descriptions, it may well have looked something like this -

It was built on Mount Moriah, a place of religious importance.

Such religious sites existed throughout the land of Palestine, and were known as "high places." People went to high places to worship, and to pray. It is at these high places that they reached out to touch heaven.

The problem was that on such high places people not only reached out to Jahweh God, but also to false deities. Their worship was misplaced, and they traveled down a dark, destructive road.

When the temple was built, it became **the** high place.

Others were declared obsolete.

Orders were given to tear them down.

Only Jahweh God was to be worshiped.

And **only** at the temple high place.

At that time God appears to King Solomon in a dream. Let's read what God says to His servant:

2 Chronicles 7: 12-18

Hear these words again -

...if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land..... (v.14)

These are words of promise.

Words wooing a people away from their misplaced high places to the only One who can give them life and truth.

Words of love - the eternal Creator calls them "**MY** people"

Words of healing.

- erasing the shame and record of wrongs committed
- healing pains and crippling damage even to the very land itself

.....and words of challenge.

Yes, words of challenge. For the people are called to turn their lives around.

They are called to make an active choice.

To **choose** to turn their back on their previously oh-so-important high places. To **actively** tear them apart, and to **actively** move towards the high place of truth - where God was resident.

God challenges His beloved people to make a choice and get active.

He would not send fire from heaven to incinerate all the High Places in Palestine, even though He easily could have done so.

He would not turn His people into little robots with instinctive homing devices that automatically would turn them towards the Temple.

They would have to be deliberate and choose them.

Friends -

That whole Temple-related scene stands as a model for our spiritual lives.

You see, we too face the challenge of spiritual high places.

Oh, the high places of our lives may not be physical places, with sacred trees and rocks and altars on them.

But each of us faces the challenges

of people

or places

or activities

or possessions

that have become too important to us.

We allow our lives to get too tangled around them.

God comes to us through the Vision of His Word and prods us.

He who loves us passionately,

and who desires our passionate love in return prods us.

"What does your life revolve around?"

"Where's the place you've built for me?"

"How high up on your list of priorities am I found?"

"My child - what is your *high place*?"

"My child - tear it down!"

Make your life a holy Temple for me.

Let me love you.

Let nothing come between me and you."

You are called by my name.

Humble yourselves.

Pray.

Seek my face.

Turn from any wicked ways.

My child -

I **WILL** hear from heaven.

I **WILL** forgive your sin.

I **WILL** heal the damaged and broken places in your life.

That Holy Word Vision calls us towards the prayer -
"Lord, show me my high places and idols,
that I may tear them down."

At once what a beautiful prayer
AND
what a terrifying prayer!!

For if we pray this way, how will we respond when the Holy Spirit reveals something we thought may have been innocent, but suddenly shows itself to have become all too-consuming or important?
What deliberate action will we choose to make?

Our beloved Creator and Heavenly Father waits for our response.
Desiring to bless us.
Desiring to fill us.
Desiring to heal us.
If my people who are called by my name.....

We're on the last of a four-part series called
Sacred Actions for Holy Living.

We've talked about Holy Communion, laying on of hands and anointing, Holy Baptism.
Today we talk about the sacred action of Confessing our Sins and Receiving Pardon and Assurance from the Lord.
It is the sacred act of doing 2 Chronicles 7: 14.

Brothers and sisters in faith -
God loves us with all the passion of a bridegroom loving His bride.
He is totally committed to us.
And calls us to be totally committed to Him -
As committed as a bride who vows to her beloved:
for better or worse, in sickness and health, for richer or poorer
forsaking all others
to be faithful to you as long as we both shall live.

Each week we take some time in liturgy, generally near the beginning of the service, to get reoriented to that vow once again.

It's amazing how easy it is to start building temples and high places in our lives. So **every week** we come to the true High Place, the place where we humble our hearts in the presence of the Living God.
We recommit the vow to be devoted to Him - and Him alone.
We tear down any high places that have shown up that past week.
We confess our sin.
And we find -
amazing grace
full and complete forgiveness assured to us
the flowing love of God poured into us. Restoring us.

It is a wonderful and very sacred act of ministry.

You will see it each week in Calvin's bulletin referred to as *Ministry Of Reconciliation*. Why call it that?

Because of what the New Testament says:

2 Corinthians 5:14 - 6:2

Hear the Bible's promise:

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.....

The powerful work of Jesus draws the heart of the person who yields to Him - draws that heart and soul into the very throne room and presence of the Heavenly Father. and pours the loving care and peace of God into their soul.

We are reconciled - brought Home.

Which, in turn, allows us to go back out and live a new week with holy determination; to live a week for Jesus.

The biblical phrase for that is "*setting our minds*."

Col 3 calls us to "*set your minds on things above, where Christ is...*"

Romans 12:1 say "*Be transformed by the renewal of your minds*."

God sends His Holy Spirit to enable us to do these things.

But He won't **do** the work for us.

We have to **deliberately** let our minds go down certain paths, and **deliberately** avoid others like the plague - be resolved and determined not to go there.

We have to deliberately determine our responses to life situations.

We can't always control the situations life throws at us - but we **can** control our response to the situation.

It's like Grandpa used to say: *you can't stop birds from flying around your head; but you CAN stop them from making nests in your hair!*

That process begins with the weekly *Ministry Of Reconciliation*.

What sorts of things do we bring to that ministry?

Consumer clutter, for one - we build high places in our lives when we fascinate about things;

when **want** turns into **need**

(I will be well when I have... the next meal out; vacations or trips; relationships; promotion.... whatever)

We come into weekly worship having played mental tapes in our head all week, verbal MP3 files which are clicked on "repeat" and cycle themselves over and over again in our head.

They are the little voices we hear of blame, self-hate, and guilt.

Voices through which the Deceiver, Satan, pours his poison into us, convincing us that:

maybe God forgives other wrongs, but not this one.

Not this time.

Not again.

No more.

If anyone really knew.

Hypocrite.

Useless.

And there is the mental photo album we carry around - images of others, particularly those who have hurt or crossed us -



we rehearse the scene
we replay conversations for the perfect come-back
we listen to the sermon and think, "they should be here to hear this"

There's more, but you get the idea.
Stuff that can poison and destroy our relationship with Jesus and with each other.

Some weeks ago I showed this painting by Rembrandt.
Anybody remember what it's of?
The Return Of The Prodigal Son.

Can you see how the Father is responding to the son?

Can you see the compassion in his face?
The gentle placement of

his embracing hands?

Those standing around don't understand. They judge. They condemn.

But He forgives.
He accepts.
He deeply, deeply loves.
And He restores that wandering child.

We come to the *Ministry of Reconciliation*, the time of confession and forgiveness, as prodigals.

And those crazy lines and images and actions -
we dump them at the feet of the Heavenly Father.
And the Father begins to restore us.

Sometimes we come to the *Ministry Of Reconciliation* as real sinners.

We have blown it.
Maybe big time.
Maybe very deliberately.
Or we've wandered.
Maybe through sheer spiritual laziness or inattention.

Then we come to confess.
And resolve to live differently.

And sometimes we come as people who have been damaged,
by the sinful acts of others
or by the presence of brokenness in the world -
sickness, poverty, injustice.

Then

instead of resolving to act - ready to **DO**

Then

as wounded people
we come,
empty,
ready to receive.

We flee to the safe arms of the Father to find healing for our wounds.
Oh, we could play all the social games. We could cover our hurts.
But then they'd become infected and distort, even control our lives.

We don't have to play any games when we come to Jesus.
For He accepts all who come.
And, so accepting and cleansing us, He brings us to the Father.
He reconciles us.
He heals us.
He gives us new life.

When you read the accounts of Jesus' life you see that He had all the time of day for those whose lives were a mess.
The ones He became impatient with were those who put on the smooth veneer, the good show, and made like everything was great;
that they were great.
Their pride and self-esteem had become their high place.
It got in the way - between them and Jesus.

So just come, friends.
Come, in complete honesty.

And come, ready to be shaped.
Come ready to be clay in the hands of the holy Potter.
let Him shape your life
into something new.
maybe something different
maybe restored and more beautiful than ever.
come ready to be shaped by the Potter.

Remember, believer, God is NOT an art dealer.
We don't come saying: "God, here is me, how I've made myself. I'd like you to market me where I can shine best."

And

We don't come viewing ourselves as rejects in a china shop; beyond hope; good for no more than to be put on a back shelf.

We come like the Virgin Mary, "*I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it to me as you have said.*"

Which is how we come to Communion.
- ready to act
- ready to receive

We come as prodigals in need of Reconciliation.
Having sinned and hurt.
Having been sinned against and been hurt.

Ready to tear down and throw away any lifestyle issue or mental image or verbal thought that is serving as a false high place.

And open, receptive, to whatever healing and love and renewal the Holy Spirit of Jesus would be pleased to gently pour into us.