

Good Friday 'Lesson'

Look familiar? That's good that you didn't forget what everything in our Sunday-go-to-meeting place looked like in just a few weeks' time. I traveled under the cloak of darkness to retrieve this familiar item just to make a point. Today is "Good Friday." Well, at least it was Good Friday when we recorded this. It's whatever day of the week it is for you when you hear it, but the point I want to make will stay the same.

This lectern, some would generously call it a "pulpit," even if it doesn't deserve to be placed in that category,—this lectern is familiar to me. Nearly every Sunday, I sit in the front row of seats in the FBC meeting place. Nearly every Sunday, as I sit there, I look at this lectern and I say, "*Raleigh, that lectern is crooked.*" Then I say, "*Well, at least it leans to the right from the listener's perspective. That's better than leaning to the left.*"

In the past, I've tried to fix it by putting things under the feet like you put a wad of napkins under a wobbly restaurant table so the coffee doesn't spill. I've tried to fix it by loosening the top and putting wedges in the right places. Nothing seems to work or, at least, no "fix" seems to last. It always goes back to its rightward lean. For now, I've quit trying, and, by the way, that's not a passive suggestion for you FBC servant-types to serve me by "fixing" it. If I wanted that badly enough I would just ask Dave or Sandy or another one of you craftsmen and women to fix it. You are always willing to serve that way.

Now, especially, right now, I sort of like it this way. It is *familiar* to me. It makes circumstances seem a bit less, "out-of-control." *Is that a "good" thing?*

In the early weeks of "social distancing," I asked almost everyone who stood or sat within six feet of me for more than a few minutes... meaning we were having a sort of conversation... "*Does all this fear and change discombobulate you? I am pretty certain you are not afraid yourself because you are trusting Jesus but I'm talking about all the fear and change around you?*" In one way or another, nearly every person answered "yes." I distilled their feelings and mine down to an anxiety created by swiftly forced change. One day the stock market was flying high—the next it almost crashed. One day you could buy all the diaper wipes you needed—the next day the shelves were empty. One Sunday you could decide to "go to church"—the next Sunday that decision was taken away from you.

My astute observation that rapid, forced change makes people anxious is not a brilliant new insight but I think it is an accurate one. I'll say why I think change can do this in just a moment. Right now, on the Friday some call "good," I have in mind a particular change.

One day the disciples were entering the Jerusalem with the crowds lauding Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah. "***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!***" Nearly just the next day (less than a week later) the disciples heard the crowd shouting, "***Crucify him! Crucify him!***" That was a forced change that could have easily produced some free-floating anxiety in Jesus' followers!

Arrested, tried in fake courts, mocked, beaten and then nailed to a cross to die, Jesus was "*gone*" to them. They had "just" witnessed him tell winds and waves to settle down, heal very sick people, even raise a person from the dead. They had heard him speak powerful messages that resonated with what they knew of God's Word and make wonderful promises of deliverance that they didn't totally understand but loved to hear.

Jesus had been making and was, from their perspective, going to continue making a world they liked better for them! It would be a world in which they would be the guys sitting on his left and his right as some of them envisioned it. It would be a world in which they held more *control* than they did now. And, they were right there with him in the middle of it all. They liked this change! In a way, this world would be "their" world. They could get some personal significance from being in the inner circle and hanging on tight to all that made them in their own eyes. *"I'm one of Jesus' original men, I "kinda" lead the guys. You can call me "boss" or "jeffe." This whole ministry of deliverance thing—this redemption business you see happening--it is sort of mine too, but you don't have to say that very often as long as you don't try to take my significance I get from it away from me."*

You think I exaggerate? Don't bet on it. The original disciples were just as infected with that "other virus," the virus of "ambitious autonomy" to grab on to their own personal significance as any of us today are infected. And, God said, *"Let us go down to take care of that virus it has spread too far and wide..."*, just as he did in the day of the Tower of Babel. He doesn't do it in the same way every time.

On the first "good" Friday, God set the tone of coming lessons on ambitious autonomy while also accomplishing a reality of redemption that had awaited the right time and place in human history. Now the sacrifice was made, the once-for-all—forever perfect sacrifice all other sacrifices had anticipated or will someday memorialize happened in the time and space of Creation.

At the same time, God didn't do it in a way assuring those men that their wonderful new world they envisioned, basically more under their control and certainly loaded with significance for them had begun. God did it in a way that absolutely pulled the rug out from under their feet. Jesus was dead and gone! *"He could have called ten thousand angels..."* but he did not and they were more "discombobulated" than they ever imagined they could be.

However, these guys still had to live through Friday and Saturday and they had a lesson to learn. God's way, God's redemptive plan in Jesus was not about their having control so they might exercise their ambitious autonomy and find their own personal significance. God's redemptive plan, would in fact, always teach just the opposite. *"You always need me! Not just on "good" Fridays but also on resurrection Sundays—and back-to-work Mondays—and hump-day Wednesdays and even Tuesdays and Thursdays as well."*

Today, in the darkness of "good" Friday let's pause to use the "discombobulation," of this Corona Virus time, and so much more pain and loss than just mere discombobulation for many, to ask ourselves, *"Do I really understand my life is now about Him and not about me. Do I get that my self-sufficient efforts at significance are often what make me feel I've lost a control I never actually had when changes are forced on me, as they are now? What is the lesson in that for me today?"*

I like familiar right-leaning lecterns, going to a building every Sunday at 10:30 AM, preparing sermons to deliver at the same time every week, meeting you at Starbucks, shaking your hand instead of bumping your elbow, hugging some of you, visiting friends who are alone, even singing together with you and laughing when most of us old people can't clap with much rhythm.

Something has changed. I seem to have lost something in these days we are experiencing. It makes me feel discombobulated—*anxious* if you want to get technical. Why? What have I lost?

Sermon: "Good Friday 'Lesson'"
RGGJR/FBCCS/4-10-20 **UNEDITED**

As I consider these days, circumstances have chipped away quite a bit more of the *facade of my control* of things to make my life what seems significant to me. Think of how Good Friday taught that lesson in a sad, and frightening way to Jesus' followers on the day he was crucified. Let, these Corona virus days, much more merciful in their lesson, teach that to you and to me as well.

Before I leave you on this darker path of thought, let me remind you of the other side of the hard lesson that we are not in control. **God is in control.** God was even in control on that "good" Friday when Jesus died for our sins.

As S. M. Lockridge preached in a sermon that brings me to tears nearly every time I hear it, "*It's Friday but Sunday's Coming!*" It is Friday and we learn beyond any doubt we are not in control of what matters for LIFE. It is Sunday and we learn God is absolutely and powerfully in control of all that matters for LIFE!

[There is an excerpt from Lockridge's sermon on YouTube: Caution some of the accompanying graphics are truly graphic! You can listen without watching if you choose.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cikenKl92Og>]