

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Epistle, Year A

TRADING PLACES

1 Peter 2:19-25

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Marcus Felde

It is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. 20If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. 21For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

22"He committed no sin,

and no deceit was found in his mouth."

23When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. 24He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

DIAGNOSIS: The Bondage of the "Free"

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Tit for Tat (A Bad Trade)

Abused, we customarily return abuse. Suffering, we threaten. When we do wrong, we expect punishment; when we do right, reward. Which is how "we have gone astray like sheep." We call that loving truth and justice (but that is a lie). We give as good as we get. No more, no less. We are not right-wising healers of the world; we are its problem.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Glorifying in "Equity"

We are the way we are because we do not entrust ourselves to God ("the one who judges justly," v. 23). We hold ourselves away from God's judgment and entrust ourselves to those who do not judge rightly, but instead judge according to what they can see. As we ourselves do, of course. (Consult the "Heidelberg Disputation" on the folly of this.)

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Not Healed, Dying

Incapable of turning the other cheek, we strike back. And then are struck again. And strike back. It never ends. In the name of "justice," of "equal reciprocity," of "truth," the world descends into the pit. Living by the sword, we die by the sword. (Seasonally adjusted: Living by the cash register, we die by the cash register; living by our looks, we die by our looks. You get the idea.)

PROGNOSIS: The Freedom of the Christian

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): This for That (The Sweet Exchange)

Good News: Jesus has borne our sins in his body on the cross—a gross miscarriage of justice, on the one hand; on the other hand, it means we may now live for righteousness. What a sweet exchange. Instead of using the scales of retributive justice, which weigh evil against evil to the end that the equilibrium might be maintained, Christ Jesus destroyed equilibrium itself by pouring himself out for us "while we were yet sinners."

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Reveling in the Cross

We "have returned to the shepherd and guardian of our souls"! It makes no sense to the world that we would follow in the footsteps of one whose way led to the cross, but in the light of

what God did in him we know that he is the way, the truth, and the life. The crucified one is our Lord. "We're back!!!!!"

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Not Dying, Living
In the light of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, we know what it means "to live." The old ways of tit-for-tat and getting "what we deserve" are over. We may pour ourselves out in loving service of others without first putting everything on a scale. And this is freedom, this is what it is to be lords of all: not to lord it over others, but to be servants of all. (Even when our service is not appreciated. Or under-appreciated. Or when people take us for granted! Whatever. If we fall back into the trap of measuring what we must suffer against what we owe people, we need to go back to Steps 2 and 3 and remember where that leads!)