

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Surprising Insights Into Law & Order"
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World Communion

Let me start off by saying "Thank you" to those who spoke to me at the door last week. Often it is the only feedback I get from the sermons. In response to last week's sermon, some of these at the door noted how deeply they had within them a rebellious attitude to authority, and an inner questioning of their leaders. We live in an age where we cannot fully trust others because they are sinful and bent in dysfunctional ways. However, God still calls us to trust God. We too are rebellious and I am rebellious often in my heart toward those ways God is seeking to plant within me and within us. The question is whether we will fight our natural inclinations to constantly distrust and mistrust that which God has placed in our lives for our good.

God's first plan was to create a heaven on earth with perfect fellowship between himself and human beings. (Actually there is a theological debate about whether God's planning of the garden, allowing the Fall, the elect and so on which led to a position called *supralapsarianism*, but I won't go there right now.) Eventually God would have allowed Adam and Eve and their offspring to eat of life, and the tree of discernment. But before that plan came to fruition, both the woman and the man chose a different path. And if you and I had been there, we would have chosen similarly. So now we live in this broken world, broken in many ways for countless generations.

God then developed friendships with individuals and promised them a place to live and a people set up in relationship with God. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses are some of the names of the first friends and their families. First, there was a smaller family unit, then a larger one, then after four centuries, there was a small nation from the smaller family of twelve sons. The census in the desert in Numbers 2 put the total at 603,550 men (Nu. 2:32), although scholars always dispute such numbers.

Through this experience, an order was established. It took hundreds and thousands of years to get to more than the tribal chaos and the criminality that inspired God's use of the flood to start over. Of course, the same criminality and rebellious nature continued on in the human race. We see it at Babel, in Sodom and Gomorrah, in the desert with the people of Israel, during the time of the judges, when the people cry out for a monarch other

than God, and they get Saul, through the wars and rebellious nature of the monarchs over the divided kingdoms of Israel (every monarch was evil) and Judah (most monarchs were evil). Evil is defined as those who commit idolatry and seek to cause others to worship anyone other than the one true God.

Finally God puts an end to the nation, then allows them back, then allows them to be destroyed as a nation finally in 90 AD. We could debate what happened in the twentieth century and to what extent the modern state of Israel has much to do with the ancient one.

But instead of going down that path, we look to key encounters with God: the establishment of the Law, the prophets, the priesthood and the monarchy become the establishment of order. We must remember such an order consistently presupposes a living relationship with God, and a desire to live in harmony with what God has set up as the best way to live.

But therein lies the problem. As soon as we see the Law introduced by revelation to Moses, we note the context of the people already having turned away from God, back to one of the idols of Egypt, and basically start again in a cycle of rebellion against the Law. This Law becomes the basis of Western civilization's law. The Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments were widely seen as the values of appropriate order. Today, we can see that such values have been eroded to the point of not teaching the Ten Commandments to children in school even for historical and cultural reasons. And so the cycle continues today of God seeking to introduce order to help us live as close as possible to that original experience in the Garden, and our choice to rebel against it. We think we know better, and the devil's voice is still in our ears.

Respecting God, one another, family, life, relationships, property is the revelation of the Law. But a basic disrespect both to God and one another constantly flows out from us, and so God tried to set up individuals: judges, prophets, priests to make sure people turn back to God and to God's ways. And whether they were charismatic individuals or whether they were a part of a clan that gave them special religious duties such as the proper maintenance of the tent or later the temple, or the sacrifices and holiday celebrations, still people generally did not turn back to God. Consciously or unconsciously they figured they knew better than God.

Even the kings who were supposed to draw the nation back to God, although the monarchy itself was developed from a rebellious attitude toward God as king, nevertheless, once it was developed, the kings were supposed to make sure the people honoured God. But this didn't happen with Saul, and Solomon wound up in apostasy. David drew the people to God, but he too had serious flaws and sins. In the Divided Kingdom, it never happened in Israel, and only occasionally in Judah.

Finally the judgment of God came upon the nation and it was dispersed, brought back in a much weaker state and then pretty much was under military occupation until it was finally destroyed about sixty years after Jesus' earthly ministry.

The Law was good. The promises God made to his friends and people were good. But the human race continued to rebel. So God determined a way that would work once and for all. That way would be for him to come and live among us. So in Jesus we have the ultimate prophet, priest and king. In Jesus, by his atoning work, we have a sacrifice for our sins, a payment for our rebellion that is absolute. All we need to do is agree with what he has done for us, and say "yes" to his ways and his will for our lives. This means saying "no" to our rebellion and our thinking we know better.

The simplest way of looking at the table of the Lord this day, along with millions of other Christians across the world, is by taking a token and symbol of his body and blood, and saying we choose his way, as well as saying "no" anew to our rebellion. These are a physical means of grace for a spiritual commitment.

The Law tells us how far we fall short of what should be, of God's commands and ways. The Law leads us to Christ, who is the completion of the Law. Paul argues this in great detail in the letter to the Romans.

God's order uncovers our disorder. Then by grace we are led to a decision. Will we choose to continue in our disorder, or bow to God's order?

Without this decision clearly made, where we know we belong to Jesus and he belongs to us, we cannot live the Christian life or know the blessing of God. The fear of the Lord is not so much being afraid as properly respecting God and God's ways, and being willing to be changed.

With this decision clearly made, we can be agents of God for the poor, for the needy, for the hurting. We can be transformed to love aright, even toward those we find difficult to love.

The table in front of us is a table of transformation. This is not so much about what happens to the elements themselves, but what happens to us who choose to partake in this.

We are the ones saying to God, "Soften my heart, Lord, to your ways, change me that I might reflect the attitude and life of Jesus Christ, help me to see with his eyes the people and places and challenges of each day. Change my rebellious heart into a responsive and willing heart for the thoughts, endeavors and deeds which move your heart, O God."

This is something you might want to say to God as you come again to the table of the Lord. And if there is any other business with God that comes up, whether very old or very new, or anything in between, please take a moment to write it down and give it the significance of a royal summons.

Let us pray.