

Lenten Worship / Sermon Series: Spring Cleaning

February 22	First Sunday in Lent	<i>“Spring Cleaning: Past”</i>
March 1	Second Sunday in Lent	<i>“Spring Cleaning: Present”</i>
March 8	Third Sunday in Lent	<i>“Spring Cleaning: Future”</i>
March 15	Fourth Sunday in Lent	<i>“Spring Cleaning: Here”</i>
March 22	Fifth Sunday in Lent	<i>“Spring Cleaning: There”</i>
March 29	Sixth Sunday in Lent/ Palm Sunday	<i>“Spring Cleaning: Everywhere”</i>

“Spring Cleaning: There”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Season of Lent, Sunday, March 22, 2015
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Psalm 51: 1-12; John 12: 20-33

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt--a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Psalm 51: 1-12

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. ⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother

conceived me. ⁶ You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be cleaner than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

John 12: 20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name."

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him."

Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Metanoia

Our word for the day is *meta·noia*.

Metanoia is Greek, meaning a transformative change of heart;
especially a spiritual conversion;
a change of mind, of attitudes, and of behavior

Popeye the Sailor Man, a cartoon character from back in the day,
was famous for eating spinach, fighting with Bluto over Olive Oyl,

and saying, *"I yam what I yam!"*
This is a part of our common vernacular and a common attitude.
I am who I am.
What you see is what you get.
I can't – or won't – change.

And yet we choose to follow and dedicate our lives
to a loving, living God who calls out to us to repent,
to turn away from sin and all that separates us
from the holy and one another,
to turn 180 degrees toward the ways of God.

Metanoia

Yesterday morning during a radio program called, "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me," [1]
radio host Peter Sagal said to the contestant: *"Here is your last quote:
'Honest to God, if you engage me in conversation about race
before I've had my morning coffee, it will not end well.'
That was PBS's Gwen Ifill talking about whose plan
to have their baristas talk about race with customers?"*
Immediately the contestant guessed correctly, saying, *"Starbucks."*

Peter Sagal observed, *"It seems strange to think
that the coffee chain could end racism in this country.
But then again, they did manage to convince us all to spend \$6 on a cup of coffee.
So why not use that power for good?
The idea is that apparently, in addition to your name,
they will write, "Race Together" on your cup.
And then they'll hand it to you in the hope that you will say, "Oh, what is this?"
And the barista can explain, "It is about racism. Racism is bad."
And the customer says, "Wow, I never realized racism was bad."*

Faith Salie observed, *"Maybe it's just 'cause I live in New York.
But do you ever go into a Starbucks where there's not a line 20 people long?"*

Mo Rocca chimed in, saying, *"Can't we all just get a latte?"*

Maybe while standing at a coffee shop counter to get something to go is the best time
and maybe it isn't the right time and place to have conversations that matter,
especially with 20 caffeine-starved java hounds lining up.

However the culture-healing effort of Starbucks is well made if not expertly executed:
our Global Village cries out for positive ways and means
to have conversations that matter,
conversations which connect the folks
who are in this circle called Here
with neighbors in another circle called There.

How about if this is where the Church of Jesus Christ steps in, steps up, steps
out
and take the point.

Rather than congregations and denominational leaders getting hung up on pettiness,

nitpicking and piddling around on non-issues,
we can do more of what First Christian Church of Decatur did
a couple months ago when 90 Christians from 8 churches
went to see the film “Selma” together,
gathered afterward in a food court,
and simply shared our stories.

My friends, you and I are good at this.

We do this well.

We do this on a regular basis in our Chalice Thrift store,
when church folks and community folks share our stories and love of shopping,

swapping joys and concerns and sales while repurposing goods and souls.

We do this when we Break Bread Together in fellowship meals, worship,
and Disciples Women’s circles, in Wisdom Weavers
and Christian Youth Fellowship, in our choirs and church park
and Wednesday evening seminar, and so much more.

We may not be all about writing “Race Together” on paper coffee cups,
yet our conversations and our actions are writing “Grace Together.”

Wait, wait, don’t tell me...what was it that God said to Jeremiah (31: 33-34)?

*“I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts;
and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

*No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other,
‘Know the LORD,’*

*for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest...;
for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.”*

We dare let God write the law and love of Grace Together on our hearts.

To be Grace Together requires tapping into three gifts from God:

the gift of listening; the gift of sharing; and the gift of being willing and able to change.

We are the Church of Jesus Christ, and we have these gifts to offer to our fair city.

When we share our stories, and when you and I listen to someone else’s journey,
we reach out from a world focused on Here

and extend our souls to connect with another life that is There,

There for the reaching & redeeming, the reconciling & resurrecting.

Metanoia

Change is so hard.

Would changing one’s ways and attitudes and mind be any easier
if you knew that God has already done so?

Chris Tomlin has produced a lovely Christian song called "*Unchanging*"
Great is Your faithfulness Great is Your faithfulness You never change You never fail, O God

Chris Tomlin affirms that God's faithfulness is unchanging.
We have observed that across the pages and stories and testimonies in Holy Bible
God does change God's mind and ways.
Yet the One Who Created and Creates does so
without ever sacrificing God's promise or power, covenant or commitment.

In Exodus, when the Israelites worship a graven image, a golden calf,
God is so upset that the Lord
 threatens to slay the Israelites right where they are in the desert.
Moses speaks up for mercy, reminding our Creator that it was the Lord
who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, out of slavery.
What would everyone else think?, asks Moses.
Would they say, "Here is a Deity who frees people only to kill them later?"
The Bible tells us that God relents,
has a change of heart and mind,
and spares the Israelites.

Metanoia a transformative change of heart;
 especially a spiritual conversion;
 a change of mind, of attitudes, and of behavior.

Or how about in Mark's Gospel
when Jesus of Nazareth encounters the Syrophenician woman?
She is a Greek, by race a Phoenician from Syria.
She asks for mercy for her daughter.
He responded to her like this: "Let the children first be fed,
since it isn't good to take bread out of children's mouths
and throw it to the dogs!"
She said, "Sir, even the dogs under the table get to eat scraps
dropped by children!"
Then he said to her:
"For that retort, be on your way, the demon has come out of your daughter."
She returned home and found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.
(Mark 7:25-30)
The Syrophenician woman and Jesus experienced Grace Together.
It does appear that Jesus of Nazareth spoke rudely to her
out of some deep seated cultural prejudice or racism;
yet when the Christ in Him began to see the Christ in her,
Jesus changed.
He changed his mind, his attitude, and even his daily practice of ministry.
As a matter of fact,
after this encounter Jesus began to reach out across cultural and racial lines,
and the Gospel has never been the same.
He went through a spiritual process of spring cleaning,
a spiritual cleansing which led the Son of God to see
the need of his neighbors out there, over there, over yonder.

Jesus remained true and faithful to God; so what changed?
Could it have been the focus of his vision?
the range on his radar?
the broadening of his compassion?

Read your Bible and you will see that from that point forward
Jesus grew from this experience to extend Grace to All
People.

Listen closely as He speaks to the whole people of God.

In the Gospel According to John,
when a voice came from heaven, saying,
“I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”
Some in the crowd standing there heard the sound and said that it
was thunder.

Others in the crowd heard the sound and said, *“An angel has
spoken to Jesus.”*

Jesus answered, offering a word of liberation and deliverance and assurance
to a people whom no one had deemed worthy to be addressed in such a manner.
Jesus said,

*“This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.
Now is the judgment of this world;
now the ruler of this world will be driven out.
And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”*
All people...all people will be drawn to God.
Not just the chosen few or the select from one tribe or nation or temple.
All people!
Jesus Himself changed and grew and moved into a higher state of being,
one where he embodies passion and compassion
for the majority and the marginalized,
for the ones who feel at home
and those with no place to lay their heads.

If Jesus could do this, then how about His
followers?

Metanoia

This Word serves to guide us toward our hope for Grace Together.
The Psalmist prayed:
*“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit
within me.”*

Be open to a transformative change of heart;
especially a spiritual conversion;
a change of mind, of attitudes, and of behavior
When the Bible speaks of repenting and returning to the ways of
God,
this is what we are being asked to be and to do:
change our minds, our attitudes, and our
behavior...usually in that order.

The Holy Scriptures' point is clear; painfully, graciously, hopefully clear:
The faithfulness of God is everlasting and unchanging.
The occasional flare ups and errors of the Divine were corrected and reconciled.
Since God can change – and God already has –
then we who are made in the image of God
can change our hearts and minds as well.
One of the toughest Christian challenges to accept is to be other-centered.

They say that a mother was preparing pancakes for her sons Kevin, 5, and Ryan, 3.
The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake.
She saw the opportunity for a lesson in morals and loving our neighbor.
She said, *"If Jesus was here, He would say,
'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'"*
Kevin turned to his little brother and said, *"Ryan, you be Jesus."*

Metanoia

Recently our fair city hosted a remarkable gathering in Atlanta.
The Global Purpose Summit featured Bernice King,
daughter of Martin Luther King,
and Arun Gandhi,
the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi,
a leader in India's independence
movement. [\[2\]](#)

King and Gandhi spoke at the Cobb Energy Center.
King's father and Gandhi's grandfather
were advocates for nonviolence and peace.

Arun Gandhi, an author and noted speaker who turned 80 last year,
lives in Rochester, N.Y.,
and runs the Gandhi Worldwide Education Institute.

He said he inherited his purpose to make a difference
and to teach nonviolence in the world from his
grandfather.

He was sent by his parents to live with his grandfather in India
when he was 12 for a couple of years
and left just a few months before
[Mahatma Gandhi] was assassinated in
1948.

Arun Gandhi said,
*“You have to make a conscious effort
to say every morning
that I am going to be a better human being today
than I was yesterday.
It’s not a switch that you can turn off and on.
Despite being born into that philosophy,
I still have to work on it myself.”* [\[3\]](#)

Metanoia

*“...make a conscious effort
to say every morning
that I am going to be a better human being today
than I was yesterday.”*

No matter what has happened in our past,
God loves us right here and now, as we are.
No matter what has happened in our past,
God is changing our hearts, our minds, our attitudes, our behavior
to be a better human being today than we were yesterday.
No matter what has happened in our past,
God is preparing us for a mighty future of Grace Together.

So why not use that power for good?

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Call to Offering and Communion

Jesus Christ's wisdom speaks across time and space. He said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also."

A key component of following Jesus is the practice of faithful stewardship. We choose to practice faithful giving as an outward expression of an inner conversion. May the gifts we dedicate to God speak across time and space, proclaiming the glory of God. Those in need, please take; and those with abundance, please give.

Please come forward, take a piece of Bread dip it into the Cup, and then partake. Gluten-free Bread is available, and if you would like to receive Holy Communion without coming forward, our Deacons will gladly bring it to you. Come to the Lord's Table, where all people are received and all people are made welcome in this holy act of Grace Together.

EXTRA MATERIAL

Can you imagine a better example and witness and model than what we have before us? The Divine Spring Cleaning expanded spiritual horizons and influence.

And here we sit and stand and worship in awe before the Holy,
humbly being shown the value and glory
of seeing the need for love
both right here and way over there.

The personal benefit and communal enhancement becomes real and authentic

when we take on a transformative change of heart,
a spiritual conversion, a change of mind, of
attitudes, and of behavior.

With this vision of the power and promise of God to redeem, the Psalmist said:

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;

according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my

sin.

³ *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*

¹⁰ *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.*

¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.”*

This Word returns us to our word for Grace Together: *meta·noia*
“*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.*”

Be open to a transformative change of heart;

especially a spiritual conversion;

a change of mind, of attitudes, and of behavior

When the Bible speaks of repenting and returning to the ways of God,

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[1] “Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me” Aired on National Public Radio, March 21, 2015.

[2] “King, Gandhi tell business owners to include a purpose with profits” Atlanta Journal Constitution, Posted: 5:28 p.m. Tuesday, March 4, 2014.

[3] Ibid.