

Reminiscere

"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."

who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

In our day and age, we are regularly treated with stories in the press about how this or that thing is in our genes.

Be it homosexuality, obesity, substance abuse, cancer, or just plain meanness.

Such stories usually touch off an old and heated debate between nature and nurture.

One side (the Nature side) argues that: since these things are in a person's genes, they are natural and, therefore, nothing can or should be done to cure them.

The other (Nurture) side, then, objects that these all result from voluntary behaviors, they can also be prevented or even reversed voluntarily.

What is seldom recognized is that both sides of the debate share a common ground.

They both agree that if something is born in us, it is natural and not a problem.

This "nature-nurture" debate among social scientists has its counter-part in religious discussions.

Here, the matter is the nature of sin.

Here again, one side argues that certain people are born with certain proclivities and that we, in the church, should not be judgemental about them.

This opinion is often espoused by the modern "liberal" churches that see tolerance and inclusivity as the hallmark of Jesus' life and work.

The other side argues back that there are certain things that the Bible clearly forbids and commands and that God wouldn't forbid it unless He meant it.

The implication here is that whatever God forbids, we are able to resist. And whatever God commands we are able to do. And this is a Christian.

These churches are usually known as "Fundamentalist" or "Evangelical."

But what do these respective positions have to say of God and His Kingdom?

If you are simply unable to do something Biblically commanded, does that mean you are a hopeless case with no chance to be in God's Kingdom?

If you are born with certain proclivities or character flaws, does that mean these are an eternal part of you even while you are in God's Kingdom?

You see, the common error of both positions is that they leave Jesus out.

The one teaches that natural purity is already in you without doing anything.

The other strives for that purity by following the example of Jesus.

Into this debate walks the Canaanite woman and her concerns for her daughter.

Her daughter's problem is that she is demon-possessed.

This malady is emphatically passive. That is, it has happened to her.

From the standpoint of standard ethics, it's not her fault!

She has been set upon and ravaged by forces more powerful than herself.

There is absolutely nothing that she could do about it.

What should Jesus do?

Since she has no control over this, should He simply declare her "natural" and go about being "nice"?

Or, should He insist that she DOES have control over it--if only she will believe harder, love more, use more will-power or some other self-help?

Unless she stands up and takes charge of this problem, she's out of the Kingdom? But what DOES Jesus do?

He helps her. He rescues her. He does for her what she herself cannot do.

He doesn't change the definition of "natural" in order to make her feel included.

Nor does He insist that she cannot be included until she makes herself "natural."

Rather, He takes her as she is in order to make her something else.

He pities her unnatural predicament and frees her from it.

As if you haven't guessed by now, this is also what Jesus is about in your life.

What are your natural proclivities? What are your personality flaws?

What demons oppress you?

We often-times talk about sin here--and rightly so.

But, in doing so, the focus is usually on behaviors--words, deeds and ruminations.

And as we define sin, this is surely something that we have done wrong.

But today Jesus takes us deeper--far deeper.

Beyond wrong-doing, there is wrong-being.

This is beyond will-power, beyond good habits, beyond any of our natural powers.

This possession is evidenced when dark, unholy, unforgiving, unloving feelings well up in our hearts in spite of our best efforts.

...When try as we will, we cannot desire what God desires or love as He loves.

So what shall we do?

Shall we continue to figure out some internal power to fix it?

...keep thrashing around until I conquer the evil?

Or should we simply accept it--stop repenting and proudly assert: "I am who I am!"

...It's not a problem. God wants me like this!"

God forbid that we should do either of these things!

There is only one thing to do. Only one thing that avails.

"O Lord, Son of David, have mercy!"

Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find.

Jesus comes to defeat the devil. Jesus dies to crush the serpent's head.

The love of Christ is not manifested in tolerating evil but in defeating it.

The Christian life is found in Christ's merciful intervention on your behalf.

He takes on the powers of hell that oppress you and frees you from Satans clutch.

And so, this Lenten season, as we renew our Christian walk, we begin with these two steps.

First, we observe as outsiders, the battle between Jesus and Satan in the wilderness.

Second, we learn again the necessity of the "Kyrie eleison." Lord, have mercy.

That is the reason why we have taken up an extended version of this Kyrie.

For it helps us focus on the one thing that will help.

And in response to this, Jesus comes today to defeat Satan and cast Him out.

He comes to rescue you from your own natural self and to give you a new nature.

This is the new nature that you were born in in Holy Baptism.

This is the new nature which is raised up and strengthened by His Word.

This is the new nature which is fed by His body and blood.