

From the Bishop

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A Message for Lent 2024

Na ke aloha 'o Ke Akua ma loko 'o Iesu Kristo, e aloha iā 'oukou a pau!

As I live into Lent 2024, a time for self-reflection and amendment of life, I have been praying a poem (entitled "Love III") by the Anglican poet and priest George Herbert (3 April 1593 – 1 March 1633) each day:

LOVE bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lack'd anything.
'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy to be here:'
 Love said, 'You shall be he.'
'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
 I cannot look on Thee.'
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
 'Who made the eyes but I?'
'Truth, Lord; but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.'
'And know you not,' says Love, 'Who bore the blame?'
 'My dear, then I will serve.'
'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.'
 So I did sit and eat.

I have found that we human beings too often confuse guilt and shame.

There are things which we have done or left undone for which we should feel guilty. I think the words of the Confession in the traditional language of Rite I best express that for which our conscience calls us to experience guilt:

Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,
we have offended against thy holy laws,
we have left undone those things which we ought to have done,
and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.
But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us,
spare thou those who confess their faults,
restore thou those who are penitent,

according to thy promises declared unto mankind
in Christ Jesus our Lord;
and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life,
to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

We human beings mess up and we hurt one another, and we hurt ourselves. Hope comes in asking forgiveness of God and of others, accepting forgiveness, and striving to lead a renewed life. Guilt at its core is for what we have done, and it can be relieved with forgiveness. In the language of the absolution: “The Almighty and merciful Lord, grant you absolution and remission of all your sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Shame on the other hand is not about what we have done, but about who we are. “The feeling of shame is about our very selves – not about some bad thing we did or said but about who we are. It tells us we are unworthy. Totally. It is not as if a few seams in the garment of ourselves need stitching; the whole fabric is frayed. We feel unacceptable.”¹

If guilt is about confession and accepting forgiveness, shame is about healing and often forgiving others. We are called to acknowledge the shame we carry – sometimes holding it tight – is a burden. Sometimes shame is forced upon us in childhood or within our families. Sometimes it comes from personal failures or the pressures of life beyond our control. Sometimes it was imposed by the world around us. It never, however, comes from God.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30 are for those of us who carry shame: “Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I’m gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light.”

Herbert’s poem promises us to sit with God who is “Love.” There is nothing we have done or left undone that cannot be forgiven. Who we are in God is the beloved – forgiven and healed. Lent is a time to separate that which needs forgiveness – from others and from God – and that which needs healing within ourselves. When we are invited to God’s table to sit and eat, it is our whole selves that is welcome. We need not carry guilt or shame before a loving God.

I pray that this Lent we can all be renewed. Where we have caused hurt, we can seek and receive forgiveness. Where the shame of the past lingers in our souls, we can release it, be healed and forget once and for all.

Love always welcomes us. It is we who sometimes fail to see our chair at God’s table.

I pray you have a holy Lent and joy filled Easter!

Aloha ma ‘o Iesu Kristo, kou mākou Haku,

+Bob

¹ Lewis B. Smedes, *Shame & Grace: Healing the Shame We Don’t Deserve* (Harper One, 1993), page 6.