

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and redeemer.*

Please be Seated.

I stood before the judge in my county once and declared that I aspired to stay within the parameters of the law henceforth. I had been caught speeding well over the limit in the village I'd recently moved to. I hoped for a reduced fine by virtue of anticipated good behavior. The judge was kind, but I doubt he bought my claim to never speed again. (I'm sure someone here has been in this spot and truly understands my remorse and good intentions!) The problem is, however, the big difference between remorse after the fact and keeping the law in the first place. Of course, laws do change, and we might not know what the law is (like me in my new neighborhood), but that won't get us off scot free.

Besides trying to keep us in peaceful order, law tries to keep us awake and alert by consequences for unlawful acts. “Pay attention,” the law says, because disorder is right around the corner if you don’t, and it will cost you. Think about a time when you got caught up in a situation that became total disorder. Even “good” folks can get caught up in misbehaving, thinking they will not be caught. We are sometimes like children who’ve played in the dirt and grass all day, with muddy necks and crusty knees, expecting to come to the dinner table without washing. As the prophet Malachi declares, we need to be scrubbed with fuller’s soap. “Wash up for dinner! It’s the law of civilized people!”

There is another problem, however, some laws are ill conceived, shortsighted, or just plain bad. And, sometimes laws become obsolete like those from horse and carriage days that just sit on the books serving no useful purpose. Things change. Today’s readings report on

significant change having to do with law that was prophesied by Malachi and its arrival confirmed in Hebrews. Luke tells the story.

One this day Luke describes, Mary and Joseph came to the temple in Jerusalem in faithfulness to the laws for maternal purification and the dedication of a first-born boy child of 40 days. They also made the appropriate dove and pigeon offering according to the law. Mary and Joseph kept the law as they knew it. But as we soon learn, the time had come for some refining and purifying of law. Simeon and Anna, speaking faithfully in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, foretold this time through their acknowledgments of Jesus and proclamations about his future. A coming new law would require a sacrifice not of doves and pigeons, but of atonement. This baby Jesus would become a “light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Israel.” Simeon further declared that this sacrifice would come at a price of suffering and

testing. Some will fall; and some— Jesus *and* Mary—will be pierced by a sword—Jesus in his body; Mary in her soul.

Luke notes that Mary and Joseph were amazed by the proclamations. But on that day, these parents probably didn't absorb the depth and fullness of them. They may have stood in the glow of Anna's affirmation of Jesus as the redemption of Jerusalem without understanding what that might mean. Their attention quickly turned to returning to Nazareth—to getting dinner and putting the baby to bed and to enjoying the shelter of home. Luke emphasizes that they finished everything required by the law of the Lord. And, he notes, Jesus grew strong and filled with wisdom and God's favor.

The prophecies of Simeon and Anna offered in faith reveal that Jesus is different. He will change things, and the law will become a primary focus. By his adulthood, parts of the Law of Moses have become rigid and sometimes harsh to the very ones it meant to guide

and protect. Just like today, people looked for shortcuts and workarounds not to do better at being lawful, but to avoid the inconvenience and costs of lawfulness. Jesus would throw much of it all out. And so today, we do not follow the bulk of the Law of Moses as written in Exodus and Leviticus even though those books remain in our scriptures and we honor their history.

As Christians, we are charged by the transformation of Law to Love. We can never forget that Jesus forged a new covenant, teaching: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. This kind of loving implies respect for the protective secular laws of our society. But this also implies responsibility to change law that hurts more than it helps.

Jesus' early life was grounded in the Law. He was raised in it. But he grew in wisdom such that he saw through the façade of law to its

essence, its inner meaning. This enabled him to reveal its misuse, forging change. Jesus sometimes worked within the law to inspire change; sometimes he modeled civil disobedience. Sometimes he seemed to straddle both worlds as in his being baptized by the strange and charismatic John, as we've remembered in recent weeks. Baptism was an evolved Judaic purification ritual that has now become the Christian sacrament of transformation. It signifies forgiveness of sins, entry into new life in Christ, and membership in the family of God.

This sacramental act does not give us immunity from sin or even from bad judgement. Our membership in Christ's body gives us the opportunity for continuing renewal, ongoing transformation through examination of our lives, repentance of our sins, and acceptance of God's guaranteed grace and mercy. This is in part what we come for each Sunday. It's not anything like me standing before the traffic court and accepting my fine. It's like me coming *from* traffic court to be

absolved. Baptism is not a law as was the law requiring the presentation of the baby Jesus that Luke reports. In fact, our Christian life is not governed by law in either secular or religious sense. We are not required to perform set duties in order to receive God's blessings. Failure to keep some certain law will not exclude us from God's love. Rather we are inspired by faith in the new covenant to be in love and charity with all people. We are inspired to build community based in this love.

Today, following the transformed law of love, Timothy and Marie, in an act of faithfulness like that of Mary and Joseph, will present William Ian to be baptized. And William Ian will have the opportunity here, in this community of St. Andrews, in our Episcopal Church, to grow strong, filled with wisdom and God's favor. Alongside him we will renew our own baptismal covenant reaffirming our belief in and willingness to practice the principles of that love. And we will confirm

our faithful support of Timothy and Marie and William Ian and each other in Christian living to the best of our abilities with love, in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church · Encinitas, CA