

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

New Way of Inhabiting Life First Week in Lent Friday, February 19, 2016 8:15 AM
Ez 18:21-28; Mt 5:20-26 (God is always in the future. God is drawing us to something new. God is not in the past.)

“Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.”

This is all on the topic of exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was determined by the Torah. It was set in rules. It was a matter of law. And Jesus is saying that’s not what God is about; **God is not about laws and rules.** They may be okay as guidelines, but **the kingdom of God is about a new life that happens within the heart and mind of human beings.** That new life cannot come about if one is following just rules. If one thinks that righteousness, that goodness, or holiness is a matter of following rules or laws or regulations, then one isn’t even there; one is lying outside of the kingdom of God. **The kingdom is about a new way of thinking, a new way of living, a new way of inhabiting life; and so this requires that one let go of categories that no longer serve that new life.**

Now **it is very difficult, as Jesus pointed out.** No one likes to do it. No one likes new wine; old wine is better. People like to sew a new patch on an old garment, but it doesn’t really work. They don’t want to throw out the whole garment; they want to keep all they can keep. We are conservative people. **We want to keep all we can keep, but some things just have to be gotten rid of, especially ways of thinking.**

That is actually the point in Ezekiel as well. **Good and evil are not static categories.** **There are not good people and bad people in the world;** that’s the whole point. **But there are people who do good or evil.** The point of the prophet is if you do good, you will be healed, supported, you will be given life. But if you do evil, no matter what your past, no matter how sterling and virtuous your past, if you do evil, you will suffer the consequences. No matter how

black and wicked your past, if you do good, you will be forgiven and restored. That's God's way. **God is always in the future. God is drawing us to something new. God is not in the past.**

God is in the future. And that **future can become present, which is called the kingdom of God**, when we are open, when we are willing, when we are ready, when we are disposed. But it isn't living a religious life according to the prescriptions of rabbis and scribes and teachers or anyone else. **It's about openness to the Holy Spirit and the teaching that comes from that Spirit.**