

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Yr. A
February 26, 2017
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Zion is the hill on which Jerusalem was built. King David captured it and made it his capital. His son, Solomon, built a temple there, which gave Zion more than political importance. It was now God's capital, the place where heaven and earth embraced. On Zion God would someday provide a rich banquet of life for His people by destroying death forever, and all the nations would be restored to God's life-saving friendship.

Then the Babylonians came, captured the city, wrecked and looted it. Zion was a ruin for generations. The survivors, eking out a primitive existence in the shell of the city, finally said to themselves,

“The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.”

And if that's the case, why serve Him? There would be no point in keeping God's ways, observing His worship, or waiting for His vindication. If God has forgotten and abandoned us, we may as well forget Him and serve the world; stop thinking about God and worry about what we are to eat, and what we are to wear. In a God-less world that's the only purpose-- look out for #1. Caring about anything or anybody else is a useless burden.

But then the Lord spoke through the mouth of the prophet:

“Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb?”

What an arresting image God uses to describe His love for us, like a mother for the child she has conceived in love, carried for nine months, and finally labored to bring to birth. The mother-child bond is physical, emotional, personal, so intimate that the father becomes almost an observer, pacing the waiting room with other nervous fathers. Though, if he has any genuine fatherhood in him he can't help but want to provide, protect, and proclaim it to the world. The hen lays the egg, the rooster crows about it.

Isn't she lovely, isn't she wonderful,
Isn't she precious, less than one minute old,
I never thought through love we'd be
Making one as lovely as she
But isn't she lovely, made from love.

Isn't she pretty, truly the angel's best.
Boy I'm so happy, we have been heaven blessed.
I can't believe what God has done,
Through us he's given life to one.
But isn't she lovely, made from love.

That's Stevie Wonder celebrating the birth of his first child, his daughter Aisha. His delight is so spontaneous, mother love is so natural, you have to wonder how any mother or father could forget and be without tenderness for their child. And yet, it happens. And the natural love binding man, woman, and child is so fundamental that rupturing those bonds is symbolic of all ruptures within the human family. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel are the human family in miniature. Their life together was original blessing as long as they served their Creator, observing the law of their own human nature built into them. But when they turned away to serve themselves, their friendship was ruptured. The original blessing was lost in the disorder of original sin.

What that story tells us is that we face one ultimate choice. All those cards marked with competing claims can be eliminated except for two: "Serve God" or "Serve Self", call it mammon, the world, or whatever. "God" or "self"; one must be in the driver's seat, the other must yield.

If we seek first the Kingdom of God, we will be given all else besides that we need in this world. In serving God we find our own happiness. But if we serve self, seeking first what we are to eat, what we are to wear, seeking security in wealth and our personal worth in the approval of others, somehow we don't find what we seek. We may become rich, but it is never enough. We possess, and yet we worry. We achieve fame, and then we flee from it.

Giving up on God doesn't work. We forget God but keep seeking Him in other ways. Caring only about yourself is a useless burden, and it weighs on the heart of God, like the suffering of a child weighs on the hearts of her parents. God wants to free us from that burden, beget in us the life of grace, bring us to new birth as His own beloved son or daughter. What security, what joy, to sit in God's lap and hear him sing:

Isn't she lovely, isn't he wonderful,
Boy I'm so happy, now that they're heaven blessed,
Let all believe what I have done,
My own daughter my dearest son,
Aren't they so lovely, made from love.