

Reading: *Matthew* 5:21-37

Text: *Matthew* 5:.. .if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire.

## **RESTORATIVE REDEMPTION OR TO HELL AND BACK**

**Introduction:** Well, I guess that we all will have plenty of hot water for showers in eternity! Or, maybe there is more. In physics we know that for every reaction there is an opposite and equal reaction. My friend, Jack Salmon, has suggested, tongue only slightly in cheek, that for every Ph.D. there is an equal and opposite Ph.D. So, it seems reasonable to say, that for every sin there is an equal and opposite redemption.

**Redemption:** While forgiveness may be a one way street, redemption is always transactional. That is, you might well forgive someone without that person doing anything in return. But redemption is a two way exchange—"Jesus died for our sins." We give Jesus our belief. "Bob redeemed himself in my eyes when he made good on the money he owed me." Finally, Bob paid me, and then I forgave him. To be redeemed is more than to be forgiven. Redemption is a two-way giving. We trade faith for redemption.

**Restorative Redemption:** But, **Redemption** is more than just a transaction. I think that it is useful if we talk

about **restorative redemption**. That is we still exchange faith for forgiveness, but with the added notion of restoring our relationship to God and our relationship to whomever we wronged, to the pre-sin condition. Ideally, the relationship between person and God is contingent only on belief. Sin stands in the way of pure faith. We have a tendency to say, “God, I am a believer, but business is business and I have to do things this way.” If we are younger we might say, “God, I am yours, but everybody is doing it, so it must be alright.” Through faith, our sins are forgiven, but there is something more; a healing process that should become part of forgiveness, this healing process is what I call restorative redemption.

Healing may take many forms. At the simplest level it might be no more than an apology to the person one wronged. If they suffered money damages it would mean making that person whole by returning money and property to the person sinned against. To heal one’s relationship to God is both simpler and more profound. Simpler, because all one need do is to ask for forgiveness; more profound because it requires genuineness and a real attempt to be authentic in your relationship.

**Personal Redemption:** Although early Christianity was certainly communal in form, it became increasingly

individual, instead of communal, in practice. During the years of the development of capitalism the protestant variety of Christian practice became fiercely individually oriented. Redemption, too, became a matter of a personal relationship between a believer and God. In exchange for one's faith, God forgave their sins. No public acknowledgement of redemption had to be made, no priest had to be involved; redemption and forgiveness were purely private matters.

Restorative redemption might not have been talked about, but that does not mean that it wasn't practiced. Again, it was an individual decision. Oftentimes the restorative action was carried out in private, but occasionally, it might be done with considerable fanfare. One suspects that more than a few stained glass windows and university buildings had their initial impetus as restorative acts.

Today personal redemption in the Episcopal Church is both private and public. In true Episcopalian style we do our best to be accommodating. Together we recite our prayer for forgiveness and receive absolution and redemption in a very public way, as part of our normal church service. Episcopal priests may also hear private confessions and parishioners may receive private absolution. In our local churches we may not follow this practice often, but it is there when we need and want it.

Restorative redemption might well be part of that private worship opportunity.

**Communal restorative redemption:** Today we see real effort, especially in the Episcopal *Jesus Movement*, to create the church as community. In our smallest churches this is easy to see and, although perhaps more difficult, many larger churches are taking pains to develop communal Christian life programs. Although most of us are cheering on these attempts to put Jesus into our everyday lives and to make the church family an operational reality, there is an infrequently discussed element of Christian community about which we seldom speak. That is communal sin and, consequently, communal restorative redemption.

We know the unfortunate history of the role of Episcopal churches (Anglican) played in the genocide of Native Americans and in “that peculiar institution” called slavery. It is easy to acknowledge these actions as sins and to pray for institutional forgiveness. The restorative redemption part is currently being prayed over and, in some instances, dealt with through church communal action. It is a lot more difficult to grapple with church communal responsibility when dealing with local homelessness, hunger and the needs of the “least of these” residing in our community. Sometimes all I can

say is “Jesus, I am *almost* doing my best, forgive me for the *almost*.”

**Conclusion:** Paul, in his letter to the Romans said . . . righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. Here is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that comes by Christ Jesus.” (**Romans** 3:22-24) Our times demand *restorative redemption*, our souls cry out for it. Our hope is expressed by the psalmist: “The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.” (**Psalms** 145:8-9) Amen.