

**S. J. Carolan-Evans**

**Sermon**

**CW Year B, Lent 5, 1<sup>st</sup> Service.**

**Jeremiah 31: 31 - 34**

**Hebrews 5: 5 - 10**

**John 12: 20 - 33**

**Obedience**

**I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen**

Obedience. There are many situations in which we are to be obedient. At my ordination by no lesser person than the Archbishop of Canterbury I was asked 'Will you accept and minister the discipline of this Church, and respect authority duly exercised within it'. To which I of course dutifully answered 'by the help of God I will'. Indeed, had I not I wouldn't be standing here before you this morning. Driving here I obeyed the road traffic laws of Ontario, being careful to drive on the right side (I'm getting used to that), exercise due caution around and towards other road users and obey the speed limit (although I note few others did). It being the season of lent, many of us have obediently been considering what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. And if we called in at the shop on the way here, I expect we did not shove any scrummy chocky bars in our bag, hoping to avoid the attentions of the shop keeper before making for the door with our ill gotten gains. After all it is still, as I have said, lent, and we have given up chocolate. In addition to these overt rules, both religious and secular, there are the unwritten rules that we might refer to as social and cultural norms. Those almost subliminal rules that we somehow obey without thinking. Following the service, we may be hungry, but I don't suppose any of us will push our way to the front of the coffee que, grab all the cookies, shove as many Oreos in our mouth as will fit and then stuff the rest in our

pocket to munch on the way home, pausing only to throw our empty coffee cup at the rector's warden. We will wipe our feet as we enter our homes and diligently avoid putting our feet up on the table or leaving ugly cup rings on its brightly polished surface (mostly). Bearing all these in mind I'd like to set us all a question this morning: why? Why do we obey? What is happening within us as we drive on the right, refrain from lying, pay for our goods, take only one or may be two cookies, use the doormat and put our cups firmly on the mats provided? When obeying do we acquiesce willingly or are we like the unruly little child who when told to sit down replies; 'I may be sitting down on the outside but on the inside, I'm standing up'? As ever, a good place to answer such questions is our readings from scripture.

Writing sometime during the sixth century B.C., Jeremiah the prophet had witnessed at first hand the fall and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the taking into exile of its population. Our reading this morning is from the 31<sup>st</sup> chapter of the prophecy. Much of the book thus far has been taken up with Jeremiah condemning the population of Judah for breaking their covenant with God. They were God's chosen people who He has brought out of slavery in Egypt, to freedom in the Promised Land. As chapter eleven verse four puts it: 'obey me and do everything I command you, and you will be my people and I will be your God. Then I will fulfil the oath I swore to your forefathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey - the land you possess today' [end quote]. But from the beginning the Israelites complained about the manner they were given, asked for kings to be set over them and pursued foreign gods. It was not all bad, there had been David and Elijah, the Temple and the faithful priests of God, but so too had there been Ahab and Jezebel, the Golden Calf and the priests of Ba'al. Despite God's persistent love for them, they had not learned to incline their hearts towards God, obedience when it came was often as fleeting as it was grudging. So, Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant with them from God in which His holy law would be within, written on their hearts rather than tablets of stone. Jeremiah did not know it, but six hundred years later we find this covenant working in perfection in Jesus. Faced with the certainty of the cross, knowing, as He puts it, that his hour has come, Jesus is genuinely troubled, genuinely in tension. How is he to obey?

Blindly under the rod of a Father who insists on the blood of his Son before his righteous anger at humanity is paid? No, no! Rather willingly because that is the Son's inclination written on his heart, an inclination that overrides even his want to be saved from this hour, an inclination that above all things seeks to glorify the name of the Father. And in our turn, we recognise this because He is one of us. We see and know his struggle. Why? Because to an infinitely lesser extent it is played out daily in our hearts too. Yet still, like the Israelites of old, we are unable to keep our side of the bargain. So, in deference to Jeremiah's new covenant, God does both sides, He makes the promise and in Jesus faithfully keeps it on our behalf.

Returning to the question with which I started, Why do we obey, what is happening within us as we obey? There are it seems two answers. I obey, as surely we must for the larger part of our lives; Either, one: *despite* myself and what I hold to be true or two; *because* of myself and my belief. The first of these responses, 'despite' - is that of the prisoner, the one who knows no freedom. The one as Father Christopher Jamison, a Roman Catholic Abbot puts it: whose 'obedience is blind, who does not exercise discernment and simply follows the most asserting voice of the one to whom life has been surrendered'. The second, 'because of myself and my belief' is the exercise of free will. Again, as Father Christopher writes, this 'way invites people to listen and then to choose what voices to follow. This' he continues 'is a double exercise of freedom: the freedom of discernment and the freedom of choosing to obey what has been discerned' [end quote]. The difference is that the latter decide what they will allow to control them and the former simply find themselves controlled by the whims and fancies of life. For Jesus facing the cross, his actions were centred on love and the obedience such love for God demands. And for all of us too, obedience to God is not something to be resented, but rather a supreme response to, and act of, love.

Amen

St Johns Burlington 17<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### **Jeremiah 31: 31 - 34**

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt — a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

### **Hebrews 5: 5 - 10**

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

### **John 12: 20 - 33**

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love

their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.