

Some nine years ago, I underwent an extensive root canal. Might I dare say, this little tale has something for us to chew on? Let me share what’s at the root of this story.

Before Dr. Deborah Battrum, my endodontist, started drilling through the porcelain crown of my tooth, she requested to have a three-dimensional X-ray taken. After a few minutes, she invited me to view the situation that had occurred at the root of the tooth, in the bone of my skull. The tooth roots were surrounded by a darker circle of tissue, as if inflamed.

Now, I had had a deadened nerve in that tooth for many years. Symptoms of anything wrong appeared about four months earlier, with a soft bump in my palate, near the tooth. While I had felt no pain, *ever*, Dr. Battrum explained the results showed evidence of periodontal disease. The gum and tooth root had become sicker than I knew! To save the tooth, she’d need to drill through to its base, to seek to restore the health of the tooth. The alternative was for it to be pulled. “Let’s save the tooth” was my reply.

After she performed that particular first procedure, she indicated it ranked about an 8 on a scale of 10 in difficulty to get to the root of my problem. She removed some of the damaged tissue, which had been draining into that bump in the roof of my mouth, and placed medication up into the bone and surrounding area at the base of the root of the tooth. At check up time several weeks later, it had healed adequately to seal it up again.

While it preserved my tooth for several years, ultimately, it and a neighbouring tooth had to be pulled. Thankfully, I now have successful implants in place, performed by periodontic specialist, Dr. Darwin Song. In each case, accurate diagnosis and corrective treatment is essential. So far, no further problems, and my ability to chew is well restored. I am blessed.

I present to you that today’s readings from God’s Word can be focused like a 3D picture that shows "God's Renewing Way Among Us."

Dimension 1: God calls His prophet Jeremiah to give warning to His covenant people:

“Behold, I have put my words in your mouth (Jeremiah).

See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms,

to pluck up (uproot or root out) and to break down (tear down),

to destroy and to overthrow. . .” (Jeremiah 1:9b-10)

God’s people are sick, and they need to know it, or they will perish! They’re deep in the throes of spiritual blindness. Their hearts are stone cold. They only give Him lip service. They begrudge giving God their concentration and their time. They rejected living by His Word and ways in their lives. And when they saw disturbing events and aggression by foreign powers in wars around them, they nevertheless sought out alliances with godless peoples rather than to turn in repentance and look to God Himself. For their disobedience and shrugging off their faith in Him, Jeremiah was compelled to say: “Hear the word of the Lord: You’re heading into exile to Babylon!” Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, would weep over Jerusalem as that historical event finally did occur some forty years after God called him to show the people the truth of their broken relationship with their God.

"God's Renewing Way Among Us" directs this warning word to your heart and mine, too. He desires our undivided attention. What priorities do our use of time and spending of His money

and gifts show in our lives before God? What manner of relationship is reflected between us in the fellowship of God’s people, His Church on earth? God calls us not to shrug off hearing His Word. Are other alliances pulling us away from a living relationship with our God in worship? Or, away from living out faith that loves and honours Him above all things? Or, away from faith that loves our neighbour with His kind of love?

But now, note the two final verbs God uses in calling Jeremiah in ch.1:10: He would also speak God’s Word **“to build, and to plant.”**

For through the pain of judgment Jeremiah would pronounce, God had a greater purpose at work. Though His people would be in exile, God never forsakes His covenant promises. After the time of punishment, He will restore His people. He will rescue them and deliver them. He will keep His Word to send His Messiah. Jeremiah chs. 30-33, the “book of comfort,” speaks in high contrast to the judgments and woes in the rest of the messages from Jeremiah’s ministry: **“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant . . .not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant that they broke, . . . 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. . . they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”** (excerpts from Jeremiah 31:31-34)

That’s God’s covenant promise renewed also to you and me. His calling in Holy Baptism washes us clean of all sin, for Jesus Christ’s blood shed in atonement covers us. Baptism grants living faith that receives God’s declaration through faith that trusts Jesus. His life shouts these words: “I paid for your sins and bore your guilt. You are free. You are Mine.”

For all the tough words Jeremiah was moved by God to speak, he was not a mere noisy gong or clanging cymbal. He reflected God’s own yearning for His people. That brings us to:

Dimension 2 of “God’s Renewing Way Among Us.” Unconditional, sacrificial love is at the core of God’s dealings with us. And He works through His messengers, pastors and Christian teachers, parents and neighbours and all who are His redeemed people to communicate and live out His love with one another.

God’s Renewing Way Among Us is love. What are *your* favourite lines of love’s description in 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter?

Is it the change love makes in every other action of faith and life that strives to serve God and our fellow human in every need? Love “God’s style” makes the difference!

Is it the characteristics of love that settle and nourish, like a wonderful and perfect meal, a true contentment and thanksgiving for the things that matter most in our lives? Listen again to the impact that God’s Renewing Way among us has: **“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”**

Love changes us inside out, even as it reveals the very heart of God. Indeed, the love of God never ends. By His love He restores His wayward people to be a people with whom He will dwell face to face. Even as He fully knew Jeremiah from the beginning, He also knows you and me, and draws us to be in His presence, forgiven, renewed, living forever--not in judgment or punishment, but in enduring love.

This “love chapter” is often heard at weddings. But it is not limited to husbands and wives. It is the way of God's love, His most excellent way, among people--such as the Corinthians were, as we heard last week--divided, in factions, troubled by sins and misunderstandings of faith and one another. To their messy Christian lives, Paul is inspired to reveal the way of God's love among us. It's like the power of God and His Word is being revealed from the inside out. His Spirit applies God's Word to reconcile factions and disputes and distrust between God's people. In place, He counsells and moves His beloved people to center upon their unity of faith in Jesus, the Head, for they are members of His Body.

That brings us to today's view from **Dimension 3** of “God's Renewing Way among us.”

At the heart of God's unconditional, sacrificial love that moved Him to warn His people, so that they would repent and live, is the gift of Jesus Christ. He is God's love made manifest. In Jesus, God who took on human flesh and blood is ever among His people. In Him, love is not limited to be some amazing concept. It is personal and real. God's unconditional, sacrificial love abides in the Son of God. Jesus' Words exude love. He proclaims and upholds the eternal Word of God so that people, like you and me, can receive new and abundant life.

Do you see? Do you see in Jesus, your Saviour? The way of love is behind all God in Jesus is doing for His people. This Love effects truth in people's hearts and minds. Jesus taught regularly in their synagogues. Jesus upheld God's Commandments perfectly. He revealed in word and action the truth of the love at the center of God's heart--that everyone, called to faith and believing in Him, should not perish, but have eternal life.

God in Christ Jesus came to this broken world. Jesus confronted evil and defeated it. Demons and all that attacks and would trap and hold us captive and in despair, Jesus authoritatively casts out. He is the one true God alive among us. And in Him we see and learn and come to place our trust. God is among us to heal us. In Jesus, God is with us to renew us. His purpose is to declare to us forgiveness for eternal life. He has come in fulfillment of the Promises of His Word. He continues to move through our world, to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God to every other town as well. God, our Creator, is in Christ. He makes friends of us who are His enemies. He approaches us, skeptical and not believing, and calls us into His living Body, to be His called-out-of-this-world people.

“God's Renewing Way Among Us.” It reaches us through the warnings and comforts of Jeremiah's prophecies. It changes our hearts by His sacrificial love. And all is made complete in Jesus Christ, the Saviour. In Him, our God is with us, teaches, heals, defeats evil, and completes the victory forever in us through faith in His death and resurrection.

So, don't let any of your deadened nerves fool you. Trust Him! He'll save your life!