

## God does not make deals with us

c-b-3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent March 4 2018

“Have I got a deal for you.” As soon as we hear those words--most of us run,  
and we should--because in all likelihood someone is trying to pull a fast one.

However, making a deal is hardwired into the human condition.

Deal making permeates almost all social arrangements.

If you work for me, I will pay you.

If you haul grain for me, you can use my combine to harvest your field.

Making a deal with someone boils down to “If you give me that, I will give you this.”

Every time we go to the store and buy something, we have just made a deal.

If you give me that, I will give you some money.

It has become so much a part of our culture and our economy, that we don't even think about it.

However, because it is so much a part of our society,

it subtly sneaks into way we relate to our God

and we end up trying to making deals with God

in the same way we make deals with the people around us.

In our deals with God we give him what we think he wants,

and in return we want him to do what we want.

We see this in subtle ways, God if you make my daughter well, I promise to pray everyday.

God if you help me get this job, I will never doubt you again.

And then there are the not so subtle deals that people try and make with God.

God if you let me let me win the lottery I promise to give half to the Church.

And my favorite, God if you get me through this day, I promise never to drink again.

The problem with this type of thinking is that it reduces our faith to a business deal.

That if we do something, God has to respond,

and he has to respond in the way we want him to respond.

This is what is happening in the gospel.

We see Jesus reacting to what is happening in the temple.

Now I have to be perfectly clear, Jesus is not reacting to what is happening in the temple.

He is reacting to what is happening in the temple.

Yes you heard right...but let me explain.

Roman coins, the currency of the day, were stamped with the head of Caesar

and sometimes the image of pagan gods.

This made them unfit for temple use, so money changing became indispensable.

But Jesus is not reacting to the presence of money changers in the temple.

The Law given in the Old Testament noted that every good Jew

was supposed to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

The Jews, who came from around the world for major feasts,

probably did not bring along animals for sacrifice.

Since slaughtered animals were essential intermediaries between God and people,

the sellers of these animals provided a necessary service.

But Jesus was not reacting to the presence of animals in the temple.

The transactions were legitimate, they were conducted in the appropriate temple area,

and they were an essential supports of the temple service.

But Jesus was not reacting to the selling of animals for sacrifice.

So what is Jesus reacting to.

He is reacting to, how the people had reduced their relationship with God to a business deal.

Exchange was the name of the game.

Worshippers gave God something, and in return God was supposed to give the worshippers something.

The worshipper gives God a sacrificial animal and, in return,

God gives the worshiper forgiveness of sins and help in various endeavors.

The temple sacrifice is reduced to a business arrangement

In this way--the mentality of the marketplace had so permeated the Temple worship that faith as devolved into a business of deal making.

However, our God is not a deal maker. He does not exchange favors for sacrifices.

Now before we point fingers at those in the gospel.

We should be honest with ourselves...how many of us have tried to make a deal with God.

Of the deals I mentioned earlier,

how many of us have made that deal with God...or something similar.

God if you make my daughter well, I promise to pray everyday.

God if you help me get this job, I will never doubt you again.

God if you let me let me win the lottery I promise to give half to the Church.

And my favorite, God if you get me through this day, I promise never to drink again.

As a church we can't hold up our heads very high.

Martin Luther broke away from the Church

because he objected to the selling of indulgences.

And let's face it,

the Church was selling those indulgences to pay for construction of many Cathedrals.

Every Christmas I get a card in the mail, from some religious order.

We promise to pray for you for the next year...if you send us \$100.

I sometimes wonder about the reasoning behind that.

So what are we supposed to believe?

Most of you are married...so let me ask you this question.

Can the love that a husband and wife share be reduced to a business deal.

If I do this, will you promise to love me?

No...any marriage based on a business deal will not last.

Love must be given freely.

It cannot be bought, or sold, or coerced, or manipulated, pressured, bullied or intimidated.

It must be free...freely given and freely received...no string attached.

It is the same with our relationship with God.

It must be free...freely given and freely received...no string attached

Jesus was reacting to how the faith had been corrupted into deal making.

Freedom no longer had a place.

And I might add that it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out

that what was happening in the temple had turned into a racket.

The priests telling the people they have sinned and the need to go to the temple  
and make a sacrificial offering.

The people go to the temple, and trade their Roman coins for the proper currency.

They pay the temple tax, buy their animal, and lead the animal to the priest for a sacrifice.

Since there were dozens if not hundreds of these sacrifices during the major feasts,

the animals would be lead away, down a few streets,

and turned over to someone who would lead back it into the temple,

where it would be sold for another sacrifice.

All of those involved in this racket were opposed to it ending. They were making a very good living

This is why the Law, or the Doctrine of the Church, can never be seen as a rigid set of precepts.

You can't do this and you can't do that...or you must do this or you must do that.

All the Laws contained in the Scriptures, all the Doctrine of the Church

are merely a collection of directives that have grown out of the experience of life.

The Hebrew word for Torah might be best understood as "instruction" or "teaching."

Thus the Law, and the Doctrine of the Church, is really—a codified wisdom.

What does it mean to be a human being?

And what does it mean to be in a relationship with God?

The Law, or the scriptures, or the Doctrines of the Church,

ought to be accorded the highest praise because they point to God.

For this reason they should be cherished more than gold.

They reflect the order that God intended for the world and for humanity.

Interesting that the Jewish people ask for a sign.

What authority does Jesus have for doing what he does?

But when they say they want a sign, they are talking about something on the physical level.

Make a rock levitate, or rain fall from a cloudless sky.

But history has proven that physical signs are very short lived.

People forget about them very quickly.

The sign that Jesus will give them is not on the physical level, but rather on the spiritual level.

They will destroy his body, the temple,

but in three days that same body/temple will be resurrected.

This is the sign they ask for, but it is also the sign they do not understand...

because they are not looking for a spiritual sign.

They cannot get past the physical level.

But we cannot be too hard on the Jewish authorities—

the disciples were always thinking on the physical level while he was with them on earth.

That is why they were always missing the boat.

It was only after Jesus died and rose

that they remembered and grasped the fullness of what he had said.

Thankfully we have had 2000 years of history to move from the physical to the spiritual.

But there are still times when we miss the boat.

This is what the season of Lent is all about.

To reflect on our faith.

To reflect on what is of God,

and to reflect on what is not of God.

Hopefully after these 40 days,

each of us, will have moved from the physical level of dealing with Jesus,

to a Spiritual level of interacting with him.