

**February 7 is the day Sinclair Lewis was born in 1885 at Saulk Center, Minnesota.**

**Lewis won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930. His best known works of social satire were *Main Street*, *It Can't Happen Here* and *Babbitt*. Yet, for all his renown and wealth, Lewis died in Rome of alcoholism.**

**Upon his death in 1951, he was cremated and his ashes sent to Rome's U.S. Embassy for disposition. One morning a visitor noticed a worker on her knees with a dustpan and broom. Next to her was an overturned funerary urn. When asked what she was doing, she replied nonchalantly, "Sweeping up Sinclair Lewis."**

**If we focus on the words, "sweeping up Sinclair Lewis," we realize the abject futility of the human experience outside of the soul and its relationship to God.**

**Our readings today, especially Psalm 103 remind us of that futility: "For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. And to dust we shall return"... But it couches this in the middle of a call to – Praise the Lord!!**

**Did you notice that? Lent is a time of contrasts... We take a look at the "spiritual undercarriage" of our lives... and then see the Greatness of our God – and our reflections turn to praise...**

**Lent calls us to rest, reflect and remember the greatness of your God**

**Psalm 103 v. 8-14, which was just read for us, provides a plumb line for our reflections...**

**v. 8 - The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love...**

**P1 – Rest into a God who is gracious**

1. The fact that God is "SLOW" to anger should cause us to ask... why is he Angry in the first place?
  - a. God is Holy and Just... righteous... and perfect. If perfection is the standard... then we all fall short
  - b. We all sin... sometimes openly and defiantly... and often in sneaky, behind the letter kind of ways... We all sin!
  - c. When I was a paramedic/Firefighter in Chicago I was having a particularly rough "knob type" experience and one of my mentors gave me a latin phrase, "Noli nothis permittere te terere."
    - i. Don't let the bastards (BAD GUYS) get you down.
      1. While I thought it was just in reference to my obnoxious LT... I soon realize that I was one of the "bad guys" too... I messed up frequently!
      2. God must have this Latin phrase completely memorized!
        - a. Israel rarely if ever got things right... at best they were toddlers in their relationship with him... And at worst they were prostituting themselves for other gods!
  2. In the midst of this reality... in which God has every right to be angry... God is in fact... SLOW or RESTRAINED in his anger
    - a. Why doesn't God just wipe the smudge of humanity off this planet?
    - b. "Gracious and abounding in love" – Covenant love, at that... Love that is one way... based on his promise!
  3. God never lets us bad guys get him down... rather, he seeks ways to restore us!

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**P2 – Reflect on a God who is merciful**

**v. 9,10 - He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.**

1. God doesn't always accuse us... he doesn't hold onto grudges...
  - a. Legal connotation... "He doesn't turn everything into a Federal case..."
    - i. One friend of mine... not a follower of Christ... was in her office and let out a particularly strong expletive...
      1. Then said, "O... I'm going to hell now, aren't I!!!"
      2. I asked her... "What God do you serve??? Thor?? The hammer god who is just waiting to slam his hammer down when you get out of line?????"

**v. 11-12 explain: For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.**

2. God expertly separates sins from sinners...
  - a. Margahrita Laski, a British Journalist and avowed atheist once said, ""The thing I admire most about you Christians, is that you have someone to forgive you. I have no one to forgive me."
  - b. If you want to hold onto your sin... God will let you...

- i. Lenten Reading from the Gospel – Luke 13:1-9 – The fig tree is symbolic of the religious establishment... Jesus is saying... “the ax is at the root... change or we’ll have to take some drastic measures”
- ii. The Epistle reading was even more pointed – Paul commenting on the Exodus noted that in 1 Corinthians 10:5, “God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert”.
  - 1. Will God punish us for our sin... absolutely...
  - 2. If we want to hold on to it... and the consequences... He will let us...
- iii. But if you’ll let go of it... he will dump it remove it completely!

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**P3 – Remember a God who re-members us...**

***As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed. He remembers that we are dust.***

- 1. In a few moments we’ll say the words, “Remember that you are dust... and to dust you will return”
  - a. Lent is an exercise in reality... it’s as if God is saying... YOU ARE DUST... in essence... one puff... you’re gone ...

*"Remember, O man, that thou art dust and to dust thou shalt return" is a quote from Genesis 3.19, at the end of the list in which God tells Adam ("man" in Hebrew) what his disobedience will cost him - which is a description of what our disobedience is costing us.*

*Note that as a sinner you are merely an example of a category, man. You are not Bob or Ted or Mary. You are just "man." This reflects, I think, the Christian insight that sin destroys personality, that sin is a turning in upon yourself that makes you less you. As a sinner, you are an unoriginal, uninteresting, derivative, unimaginative bore.*

- 2. In the midst of this honest reflection... however... is the reality of a God who has compassion... and re-members
  - a. He is the one who can gather up the fragmented... disparate... scattered and schizophrenic pieces of our lives and “re-member” them... put them all back together.
  - b. At the heart of all this is the fact that we are His children... and he has compassion on us...
- 3. Anamnesis is what we do every week... we “re-member” ourselves together... by God’s grace... to praise Him for his salvation, for his benefits, for putting us together In Him...

1 Praise the LORD, O my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

2 Praise the LORD, O my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits-

3 who forgives all your sins  
and heals all your diseases,

4 who redeems your life from the pit  
and crowns you with love and compassion,

5 who satisfies your desires with good things  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

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20 Praise the LORD, you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
who obey his word.

21 Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,  
you his servants who do his will.

22 Praise the LORD, all his works  
everywhere in his dominion.  
Praise the LORD, O my soul.

***Lent calls us to rest, reflect and remember the greatness of your God – Lent calls us to honest reflection...***

**A – Two Points to reflect on...**

1. One is blindingly obvious...
  - a. IS this your God?
    - i. Have you asked for this God's mercy... or are you working to avoid the Hammer God's wrath?
2. The other is more challenging...
  - a. What are you resting in??
    - i. Sure... most in this room are followers of Christ...
      1. But we often bring along various crutches as we follow Christ...
        - a. Are you resting in God's grace, mercy, and re-membering... or are you trusting in your own strength, your own wits, your own self worth?

Lord, as we enter into Lent, help us to set aside everything that is not you... and give us the courage to "rest" into you our gracious, merciful and compassionate God. Amen!