

Homily
April 6, 2025
5th Sunday of Lent
17:41 – 31:16

How many here have heard of a “paradigm shift”? Raise your hand. Okay! A number of you.

A paradigm shift is not two dimes put together to make 20 cents.

A paradigm shift is a re-imagining a first principle. Or an event, or replacing it with another principle or event with greater meaning. Or different meaning. I think of one in our history – not current – when the paradigm shift was going from, “the earth is flat,” to “the earth is round.”

And another one: “The earth is the center of the universe.” But, “the sun, now is the center of the universe (solar system.)” That’s a paradigm shift.

It affects a lot of other things, when you have a paradigm shift. And they’re not always easy to adjust. It’s just not.

I bring this up because all of our readings, including the Psalm, speak to paradigm shifts. Our First Reading, is from Isaiah Chapter 43. Chapter 43 is early on in Second Isaiah, chapters 40 to 55. And it is written by a student of Isaiah, the original prophet, to the people who are in exile in Babylon.

This particular reading begins very quickly to speak about God doing something new. He is going to bring them back home. And it is such an unexpected, moving change, that the writer insists, “Don’t hold onto the things of the past, that is, the ‘Exodus experience.’ Now focus on this something new.”

It doesn’t mean you forget the Exodus experience. But he’s asking them to shift to a new paradigm. That is, **freedom** from being captive in Babylon. Being home. And it’s all God’s doing.

Psalm 126 echoes this. Scholars say it was probably written and used soon after they get home from the exile. And it really supports the joy that this paradigm shift has brought them.

Yes. They’re home. But they’re hungry. And they begin to realize that God not only brought them home, but he wants them to thrive and eat. And eat well.

We know of St. Paul’s moment of paradigm shift, don’t we? You know, he was railing against the Christians, the Jewish Christians. He was even persecuting them. Throwing them into jail.

And then, he just happened to be on that road to Damascus. And the world went upside-down for him. “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And we know what happened from that point forward.

He became the champion of this Christ. And as we heard, he let go of that which was before. He shifted his paradigm to that of Christ and the gift of hope through justification, not fulfilling the Law.

That's a major shift.

And then, the Gospel. We might miss this shift because it's a bit more subtle.

We know this story very well, don't we? About the woman caught in adultery? You've heard it before, haven't you, Mike (Guinan)? You have. Good. That's good. Why do you sit up here, so I pick on you? Because I like you! Good answer!

Jesus is preaching. People are listening. And then Scribes and Pharisees, experts in the Law, bring a woman caught in adultery. And put her right in the middle.

Imagine yourself, okay. Just for a moment. Being so shamed. Your public sin is named. And the punishment is named. And everybody's around you, looking at you.

There's just one problem here. Where is the guy? (from the congregation, "Yeah!") (Laughter.) That happened last night, too. Didn't it?

Where's the guy? You know. Because you see, in the Law, that's outlined in Leviticus and, two places in Deuteronomy, this public sin --- BOTH were to be present before their accusers and both were to be killed. Or stoned, which is the same thing.

And there's something else missing. The ones who were to cast the stones first were supposed to be the accusers. The witness accusers. Not just those who are on the edge and heard about it. No. The witnesses. Where are the witnesses?

This tells Jesus, "This ain't right." So what does he do? He gets down and starts scribbling in the dirt.

And we don't know what he wrote. Some scholars say that he was writing the sins of the Scribes and the Pharisees.

Or, he was writing on the ground his paradigm shift: from retribution to mercy, compassion and truth, as opposed to the shame that others are placing on this woman – in the name of the Law. And actually, misusing the Law and not even following it.

Well, whatever he did, when he straightened up, it was enough, wasn't it?

"Let the one of you who is without sin throw the first stone."

And they melt away. Now the accusers have been accused. And they are now shamed. But not in a mean way. Just a statement of fact.

And now the woman, who's been standing in the middle totally alone, although in a crowd, is asked, "Woman. Where are they?"

And by that, Jesus reaches out to her, shows her compassion and forgiveness and sends her on her way, with a charge: "Don't sin like this again." I know it says, "Sin no more." But it really is about don't do this sin anymore.

Do you see the shift that kind of subtly got us?

Retribution. Holding up the Law. Misusing it.

To compassion, mercy, understanding, holding dear the person who has been so shamed.

Have you ever been shamed? I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand. Because then, whoever is sitting next to you is going to ask you, "What? What happened?" Especially husbands and wives, you know? You're really supposed to share everything, but sometimes it's like, "I don't want to talk about this..." Right, Sam?

Was punishment, retribution the focus of those moments? Was there anyone there sharing compassion and understanding? Was there anyone there to say, "You're forgiven?"

You know, there are a lot of paradigm shifts in our life. When people marry, they shift from being single to a whole new reality. When people become parents for the first time, their world goes upside-down because now it gets really serious – this new reality.

I'd like to invite us all to consider what might be a paradigm shift that has happened in our life. And are we being faithful to using it as the focus of how we live. I'm not going to name it for you. It's yours to figure out.

"Oh Father. You're giving us homework!" Yes. I am.

It may be, as I have been reflecting on it this week, going from a shift of being servant, to being the beloved son. I'm not talking about my parents. I'm talking about being a servant of the Lord, to being a beloved son of the Lord.

That's quite a shift.

So, ponder your life. Ponder what guiding principle or event is in your life. Name it. And then see what was before and what is now. And how you're living now.