

## Martinet and Mercy

L5-20, March 29, 2020  
Isaiah 43:1-7

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How are you holding up?

It was good to see a lot of people getting outdoors this past week,  
some fresh air and exercise from being cooped-up.

I hope you are managing your mental health as much as your physical health.

Please know our Parish Nurse Barb, Deacon Erica, I and others  
are glad to take calls should you want to talk.

My youngest daughter is self-isolating in her apartment with 3 roommates.

Classes are online and they cook for themselves.

Besides sleeping a lot, they play board games.

My wife and I have been enjoying crossword puzzles in the Star Tribune.

Yes, we still subscribe to printed news!

One of the delights of crossword puzzles is new words to add to my vocabulary.

One of this past week's puzzle dredged up the word "martinet."

I heard the word before but never really used it,  
never had the reason to use it.

*Martinet* is a military term meaning

excessive stickler for rules to the point of moral compromise,  
following rules no matter the reason or consequence.

It's a cover for avoiding responsibility,

just sticking to the rules regardless of the effect on people.

That is who the religious leaders were

in the gospel reading from Mark, chapter 3.

In the synagogue, a place for worship,

on the sabbath, a day set aside for God,

a disable man enters, and they watch to see what Jesus would do.

Rules say no work on the sabbath.

Rules say attend to the Lord in the synagogue.

Rules say avoid a crippled person for some reason they are punished by God.

*Martinet*s, stickler for rules regardless of who suffers the consequences.

What if God is a *martinet*?

What if God is stickler for the rules?

Some Christians believe that.

There are valid reasons for the rules, the commandments God gives,

for the laws and regulations of the Old and the New Testaments.

Laws, regulations, rules keep things predictable and safe.

They protect social structures and interpersonal relations.

They are a means for justice and regard for even the poor or marginalized.

Rules have good purpose.

God Almighty, Creator and Lord,

our authority above all others, even above our governing authorities,

has set laws in place to protect.

But what if God is a *martinet*?

What if God is stickler for the rules?

What if we cannot quite meet the requirements of all the rules?

What if circumstances beyond our will

prevent observance of all of God's commands?

Violation, even just falling short,

is unacceptable to a stickler for rules.

But if rules, laws can be broken from time to time,  
     how important are they?, how realistic are they?  
     And who gets to decide when a law is allowed to be broken?  
 God Almighty gave laws and expects them to be obeyed.

The ancient kingdom of Judah faced such questions.  
 The prophet Isaiah wrote over several decades during a time of great political instability.  
 The prophet urged Judah's kings to turn to God,  
     but kings instead bet on political alliances with suspect nations.  
 Disaster inevitable fell.  
     The Hebrew people suffered consequences.  
     Elite and educated were deported into exile so they wouldn't lead revolts.  
     Laborers and farmers were pushed into slavery to support the occupiers.  
 It was apt punishment for transgressing God's laws,  
     deserved consequences for breaking the rules.  
 In exile or under forced labor  
     the Hebrews no longer could follow God's law.  
 So, is God Almighty a stickler for the rules, a *martinet*?  
     Or, are God's rules not all that important?

The prophet Isaiah speaks to this dilemma.  
     The laws of God stand for all time, are expected to be obeyed.  
 But the Lord God takes it upon God's self the consequences of disobedience.  
 Not a stickler for the rules, not a *martinet*,  
     but a God of *mercy*.  
 In the time of oppression, in a time of loss,  
     when all is upended and the coming years uncertain,  
     when people are cut off and social normalcy dashed  
     The Lord speaks hope.  
*But now thus says the Lord,*  
     *he who created you, O Jacob,*  
     *he who formed you, O Israel:*  
*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;*  
     *I have called you by name, you are mine.*  
 In this time of social upheaval, economic recession, dashed normalcy and uncertain future,  
     God speaks, "Fear not... your are mine."  
 The Lord our God has not abandoned us in this time.  
 The Lord our God has not punished us for waywardness and disobedience.  
 The Lord our God declares  
     that God is still our God,  
     that God redeems these times,  
         is bringing about correction,  
     that God knows each of us personally,  
         knows our heart, knows our secrets, knows us precious, knows our name  
         and claims us as God's beloved.  
 As we pass through these waters, we hear God's promise,  
     *I will be with you... they shall not overwhelm you.*  
 We will make it through this pandemic season.  
 Though many of us will eventually be infected,  
     *when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,*  
     *and the flame shall not consume you.*  
 What may befall us, God will protect and God will preserve.  
     *For I am the Lord your God,*  
     *the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*

There are signs for those who look.  
 Our national leaders are struggling to manage the big picture,  
     and we ought to pray them success and give our gratitude.  
 Our national leaders are taking actions that put people above profit,  
     community above corporations.  
 “Socialism” was once a detestable word,  
     but is becoming our national policy  
     and is coming closer to Biblical morality.

And there are more simple signs, closer signs.  
 Many people are now without work.  
     Some of our own congregation members are without work.  
 My wife and I have a cleaning service for our home.  
     The cleaning staff are mostly immigrant parents struggling to feed their families.  
 The cleaning company has suspended service,  
     and the staff no longer have income.  
 So, many of us customers have asked to continue to be billed  
     so that there is money to pay the staff even when there is no service.  
 There are many instances of this happening,  
     people looking out for one another in time of need.

I have read about restaurant patrons looking out for waitresses and waiters.  
 Sit-down dining is not allowed,  
     and the needed tips to supplement wages are no longer given.  
 But restaurants are attempting to serve take-out,  
     with deliveries either at the restaurant or delivered to homes.  
 And patrons paying tips of 50%, 70%, knowing that restaurant staff are suffering financially.

Therapists continue to care for patients by telephone or online.  
 Friends are learning the joy of ZOOM parties,  
     of fellowship and joking and good time through online technology.  
 You are taking part in this worship  
     thanks to your staff and volunteers  
     who are imagining new ways of praising and thanking God.

Many needed services such as  
     trash pickup and electrical power,  
     running water and sewer,  
     weather reporting,  
     media broadcasting, *Netflix*,  
     continue even while we all suffer seclusion.

God is with us as we walk through the waters,  
     provides and protects as we face these fires.  
 God continues to support and supply services we need for society to function.  
 God continues to stock grocery stores,  
     continues to keep open clinics and hospitals,  
     continues to maintain our streets.

Ours is a God of *compassion*.  
 Ours is a God of *life*.  
 Ours is a God of *supply*.  
 Ours is a God of *community*.  
 Ours is a God of *mercy*.  
     *For I am the Lord your God,*  
     *the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*

Do I hear an “Amen?”  
 Do I hear your *Amen*?