

Sunday, March 18, 2018

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 51:1-12

John 12:20-33

Written on Your Heart

What do you remember from your younger days that you could recite today? For many people, reciting poetry, or portions of Shakespeare's plays, or passages of scripture were a part of the education you received both in school and in church school. What examples do we have of this in your experiences?

For many people who were raised in the church "The Lord's Prayer" and a few scripture passages were often chosen to memorize. These passages often included naming the Ten Commandments, Psalm 23, John 3:16 and maybe a few lines from the New Testament story or specific Psalms that have been helpful through the years. Yet today our schools do not emphasize the memorization of passages of Shakespeare, or even remembering some of the key math, chemistry or physics formulas which we needed to years ago. The rationale for this is because we live in the technological or electronic age and can go to any computer or cell phone and download the information we need. But how helpful is this when we reflect on what we might need to know when facing not a physics test but a crisis and or a crisis of faith?

Throughout Lent we have been focusing on covenants. The one the prophet Jeremiah writes which was read this morning is often forgotten in in the mix of the others which God made. We are more familiar with the covenants of Noah—the rainbow promise; Abraham- the stars as the number of descendants and the commandments given to Moses, than this 'written on your heart' covenant of Jeremiah. But we should understand this covenant for not only does it help us to grow in our relationship with God and his love for us, it elevates this relationship even more. God declared that there was a time that came that a new covenant was needed for both the people of Israel and the people of Judah. The covenant was "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people."

God's laws would be on the minds and hearts of those who believed and lived for him. God would be in relationship with people as never before. Everyone would know God and the teaching of others would not be required. Why lead to Jeremiah to write these words of a new covenant with the people? Because the people kept breaking the covenants of the past. God took them out of Egypt and even though God loved, cared and protected them like a husband in a marriage, they broke the covenant and turned away. But God was not going to give up on his people, he wanted them to know him and so in the minds and hearts of his people they would

know him personally and live within the parameters of his teachings. The people would not have to teach others about God's laws and ways of life, everyone would just know this and they would not turn away from God either. God forgave them and they would live a new life.

But what does this mean? We know that the generations of people who followed after Jeremiah's teachings were shared did turn away from God and yet God did not give up on them. People still turned to God and then away from him just as people do today. People know God is there but for some/ many people following and living according to His teachings and laws are only for when crises come or when necessary.

Gracie Allen played in a comedy team with her husband George Burns. Once, Gracie called in a repairman to fix her electric clock. The repairman fiddled with it for a while and then said, "There's nothing wrong with the clock; you didn't have it plugged in." Gracie replied, "I don't want to waste electricity, so I only plug it in when I want to know what time it is." For some people they only want to plug into the knowledge that God loves them when they are facing a crisis or trouble in their lives. They need to re connect to God at least until all is well or a new normal is established. We save our religious understandings for a rainy day. We go about unplugged and wonder why our lives are so devoid of power. Christian faith is not something to be plugged in when it is convenient or when it is necessary. The Christian life is lived daily.

There are many who do not know that God loves them, nor do they know of the laws and teachings of God. Yet there are many faithful people who do know God's Word and are more apt to live out their faith because they know the laws, the teachings and the way to live with others. These are God's faithful people. They are God's people because they know his Word and live it out each day. They read and understand and listen to the words of God. They know Jesus' story and don't turn away but turn to follow again renewed in faith and with hope for a better tomorrow. Those who have God's laws and Jesus' teachings written in the minds and hearts and live them out each day.

Our reading from Psalm 51 states "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me"(v.10) The Jeremiah covenant of having the teachings of God written in the hearts is also knowing that God's Spirit is upon each person who believes. This means that those who believe, experience God's Spirit and know in their hearts and minds the teachings and laws of God.

What does this mean in light of our Lenten journey and as we prepare for Holy Week= Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday? We need to plug in or connect to God's word again. We need to take time to understand what Jesus meant when he said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it

remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” Just what was Jesus referring to when he spoke of a kernel of wheat and dying?.

Jesus knew that the time was coming for his arrest, trial, and eventual death. He also knew that they did not know that as the son of God this was prophesied to occur until much later.

But what did he mean? To understand the words of scripture we need to read it again. In “The Message” by Eugene Peterson's he interprets this passage this way: "Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is, destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal."

Jesus knew he had to die in order to rise from death and offer to others the gift of eternal life. This would only be possible through him. This was God’s plan for the people of his creation to live with him forever. That they would be reconciled to him once and for always through the forgiveness of sins made possible by Jesus alone. God kept the covenants he made with Noah and Abraham and here Jesus is telling those listening to him of his pending death so that they could live for ever. But they were not sure what he meant. We who know the story of Jesus’ love for us shown through the events of Holy Week can do something to know in our minds and have it written on our hearts that we truly love God and are willing to live His way. But what are we to do? Yes, we are to read the Bible, pray every day, worship God and pray for others as you reach out in love. If we are going to get anything out of living the Christian life, we have to invest ourselves in it. To invest ourselves in the Christian life means to listen to Jesus’ story, and through listening and hearing Jesus’ Passion our hearts are open to receive the Word of God and we are willing to serve others.

John Wesley as leader of the Methodist Church wrote the following Rules of Conduct so that they would grow in faith and have the knowledge of God written in their hearts and minds each day. Wesley wrote:

Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.

This is the meaning of the Passion. The crucifixion of Jesus is God's conduct; it is the rule for our lives as long as we shall live.

As we continue our Lenten Journey let us prepare our hearts for the journey of Jesus from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem to his passionate love to the thief on the cross beside him. And to his plea to God as he gives up his Spirit and dies. Let us live out the words that are written in our hearts and on our minds as we seek to grow in Christ's way and as God first taught us. Let us pray.

Holy God of grace and love, open our hearts and minds with your Spirit so that we may hear your words of faith and hope and love. We have promised our lives to serve you always. Help us to grow in understanding who you are as we recall the events of Holy Week and as we prepare ourselves for the wonder of this time of renewal in life and in faith. Hear us O God as we pray to you in this time of silence.

Write your words of love on our heart and in our minds so that we will always live by faith in you. Amen.