

I Will Write it on Their Hearts

Sermon - Emmanuel 3/18/18

Covenant – again we hear the theme of this Lent in the reading from Jeremiah. Jeremiah seems to understand The New Testament Covenant Christ came to share with us, yet, he is explicitly speaking to the Israelites. Yet, another covenant from God is offered to the Chosen People. As you know, the most famous Covenant is the one of Moses and God on Mount Sinai – where God gives Moses the stone tablets upon which is written the 10 Commandments. As Moses is descending the Mount, the People had melted all the gold they had and formed a golden calf, which they were worshipping. Even as Moses descends the Mountain with the Covenant of God! How hard hearted they were that they did not have the faith or patience to await Moses return with God's message. No wonder the Law was written in stone, as their hearts were that hard! Yet, God continues to forgive the Israelites and continues to reach out to them in love. No matter how many times their hearts grow hard and they abandon their

Covenant, God still desires to relieve them from the bondage of themselves.

As we look at the 10 Commandments, we see that they are about relationship. The first three are about our relationship with God while the last 7 show us how to relate with each other. In Exodus and Deuteronomy we find a myriad of laws which prescribed the way the Israelites were to live almost every aspect of their lives.

Why did God give these detailed and demanding laws to the prophets to pass on to the People? This certainly took the spirit out of the Law and made the living out of them like a heavy and burdensome weight upon the shoulders of the faithful. Perhaps this happened because they People were not being all that faithful, but continually strayed from the original 10 Commandments and God needed to give them more direction instead of less direction. The Israelites were hard of heart. They could not see beyond the weight of the Law upon their shoulders to understand that if they lived by the Spirit of the law in the first place, there would be no need for every aspect of their lives to be controlled so minutely.

Jeremiah gives us a foreshadowing of the Covenant that Jesus would bring to us. He shared God's words: "I will put my law within them and I will write it in their hearts." The Israelites were in exile at the time Jeremiah was writing – they were taken from their homeland and forced to live in Babylon and Assyria. They continually prayed and pleaded with God to let them go back home where they could worship God properly. God heard their cries and sent word to them through the prophet Jeremiah that He was in fact with them and would offer them yet another Covenant. There was more to their exile than physically being away from home, however. They were also in spiritual bondage. They had moved themselves so far from their relationship with God that they were exiled by their stubborn attitudes and outlook upon God's Covenant.

How does this translate to us in today's Church as followers of Jesus? Next week is the Holiest Week in the church year – that is why we call it Holy Week. We give a lot of emphasis on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. But what about Holy

Saturday? It is an empty day – the tomb is empty, the disciples have no idea where Jesus' body has been taken. It is kind of forgotten in the celebrations of Holy Week, but it is also the day that most clearly represents where we are in our faith lives and in the life of the Church. What we are experiencing is the **Already** and the **Not Yet** of God's Covenant. Jesus has **Already** come to earth, has taught the Gospel, has suffered, died and Risen from the dead, yet, there is another realm of our relationship with God that has **Not Yet** come – at least for those of us still living in the in between times of God's Covenant. The **Not Yet** of Jesus return to earth at the Second Coming in the last days to bring those who are left to heaven keeps us focused on our call in our faith lives. That is what Holy Saturday is all about – the waiting and living in the unknown of our lives. For the disciples Jesus had died and had not yet risen. It was a very long day indeed. They gathered together to ponder what it all meant.

In the meantime, God had begun to write his Covenant in their hearts. They believed in Jesus and in His teachings which we

have come to know as the Gospel. They were living the Spirit of this new life. God writing the Covenant in our hearts is not a romantic concept or a *feeling* of God's love. It goes much deeper than that. Writing the Covenant in our hearts has more to do with having a core experience or core identity of being God's disciple. It is about who we are as Christians, and not as Individual Christians either, but as the Body of Christ. While this Covenant is from God, it also wells up from within ourselves and out to others. A good example of this is Francis of Assisi. Many of us know Francis because he is the patron saint of animals, but there is so much more to him than this. He went against the established church of his time in the 1200s to encourage Pope Innocent that the Church had become too focused on riches and less on the poor of the time. Francis was a radical follower of the Gospel – the Covenant had been written upon his heart and he felt he had no choice than to challenge the elite of the church to reform. He was ridiculed by the leaders of the church both in Assisi and in Rome. Yet, he persisted and wore down the church leaders who allowed

him to form a religious order of men and women who would help to reform the church's stance toward the poor.

What have you done in your lives because God's Covenant is written in your hearts, the conviction of your core experience or core identity, could not be resisted? I am confident that each of us has done innumerable things for others because "It was the right thing to do." Don't you think it is because of God's Covenant written on your heart? In our age of advanced technology we tend to pass over situations and events in our lives as just coincidence or because it is how we were raised. If we take the time to look more deeply, I think we will find, if we are honest with ourselves, the things that we do and have often taken for granted have more to do with our relationship with God than we imagine. We might not be able to prove this or research it on the internet, but that is because it is part of our faith lives, is personal and is deeply imbedded in who we are. Our relationship with God is more than a "Jesus and Me" concept. The Covenant is not written on our hearts for ourselves alone! We are the hands and

feet of God on earth and the Covenant written in our hearts is there to share this Good News with others. This takes many forms and does not necessarily include preaching the Gospel with our mouths, but with the things we do for others.

Parker Palmer writes beautifully of the “true” Covenant that “means the acceptance of weighty obligations to a Lord who demands that we do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God”. We do not do this perfectly and when we fall short, we come to God in prayer and repentance. We also go to each other to confess our short comings and seek forgiveness.

One of the women who attends the Women’s Conference and is in charge of coordinating the worship services asked me to take over the coordination because of an illness that has begun to afflict her. I had to decline because of all the items on my plate right now.

That is all I really had to say, but because I was stressed and could not take on one more thing, I had to go on and on about all I had to do. Upon reflection, I realized I did not have to dump all of this

on her – for heaven’s sake, she is sick and needs assistance! That does not mean I had to accept her request, but it did mean that I needed to go to her and apologize for my rant. My answer was still the same, but the way I said it had changed.

When we internalize the Gospel and accept the Covenant that God has written on our hearts, we are more likely to look for ways to be of assistance, to practice kindness, do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.

Let us pray.