

March 21, 2021

**“Our Secret Heart”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,[a] says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Psalms 51:6-12

*You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

John 12:20–26

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

Message “Our Secret Heart”

I ask myself when I'm preparing a sermon “How would Jesus have preached this passage”. For one thing he wouldn't have used a manuscript, or notecards, or a microphone.

He wouldn't have had the new testament of course, or the internet, but he would have had what we still think of as the old testament, the Hebrew scriptures. Those were his scriptures and he knew them well.

From what we can tell Jesus just preached from the heart and from his knowledge of scriptures. We learn a lot about Jesus when we study what passages were important to him.

The winner of that distinction for Jesus is the Psalms. The prophets also rank up there as well. Now there were a lot of words put in Jesus's mouth by the gospel writers but those aside, scholars still believe that the Psalms and prophets were very important to Jesus.

So the scripture readings this morning help us understand Jesus, not because they foretell of Jesus's death but because they give us a glimpse of what influenced Jesus's thinking, what was in his heart, what his understanding of God was and the ideas that shaped him and his vision for us.

We can begin to see who he was and how he was hoping to evolve the religious leaders of his time beyond their legalistic cage, trying to show the loving and forgiving God that he worshipped.

He used the scriptures like this, focusing on passages that spoke of our obligation to care for one another, to love one another rather than punish, exclude, and shame.

He focused on Scriptures which showed we are equal in the eyes of God, no matter our station or wealth. Like the Psalmist said he wants us to tell the truth, for it will set us free. And to listen to the wisdom of our hearts.

This is important, it is important to know what the one that we follow wanted to teach us so we can continue to be his servant in this world. As the gospel read this morning for “when we serve Jesus, we honor God.”

He wanted us to love one another, he was crystal clear about this. He wanted us not to judge one another, again very clear. He wanted us to hang out with the outcasts, wanted us to include those who had been shamed and discarded, and to do that with our heads held high. And he was willing to give up his life to get this point across: we are to love one another.

Matthew often refers to Jesus as the fulfillment of “The new covenant” that Jeremiah spoke of and Jesus's preaching often talks about the unequivocal forgiveness of sins that the Psalmists spoke of, God's ability to forgive us and give us a clean heart. That is where Jesus wanted to lead us.

Jesus also knew that the new covenant with God was not about the Temple anymore, or the religion that it represented but rather that the new covenant was written on our hearts.

We no longer needed a rabbi, or priest, or anyone to run interference between God and ourselves. God was and is available to all people and in all places. We all have access to that peace, that healing love, that absolute forgiveness and complete acceptance that can only come from God.

Jesus upset so many for this very reason. Those who wished to control people through their religious sensibilities, through their fear, despised Jesus for preaching that God was accessible to all; Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, sinners, lepers, tax collectors, and even to the very end up on the cross to criminals. To me that is simple, and yet did you watch the news this week?

Over and over again we see the same patterns play themselves out. People drawing lines around God's love and claiming who gets it and who doesn't. This is just flat out wrong and in our hearts, secret or not, we know this already.

We certainly witnessed a very human attempt to shrink the Grace of God when the Vatican came out against blessing same sex marriages and I experience it everyday with the myriad of different denominations that I have served as a Chaplain. Some I can't serve communion to, some I can, some denominations I am not supposed to lead the prayer, the man is.

On and On, silly human rules around the unimaginable, infinite divine love of God. Yet, when we return to Jesus we see a different man. The only rule he espoused was that we All are to love one another and we are all to love the Lord God with all our heart, soul, and mind.

As we begin this movement toward Easter our lectionary moves us through some of the awfulness that happened to Jesus prior to his execution. It always helps me to remember Jesus' words from the gospel that it is only after the seed dies that it bears much fruit.

I don't think God caused Jesus to die, I don't think it was a series of preordained events, but Jesus's words bring me comfort because they remind me that God can use any event in our lives or in our deaths, even the absolute worse day and turn it into something beautiful.

And even when we really, really mess up we can ask for forgiveness, for a restart like the Psalmist did. "Lord, Give Me a Clean Heart".

Now if King David did indeed write this Psalm then he was in dire need of A LOT of forgiveness. By any standard what he did to Bathsheba was rape and what he did to her husband was murder. So we know that if David can get a Clean Heart then we can too.

God desires our deepest truth and that is a necessary part of us feeling right with God. Just reach out like the psalmist did and let God know what you feel bad about, what you hope for, what your dreams are. Our deepest truth. There is wisdom to be had when we do this, guidance from the spirit comes when we let God in.

When you let God in to that innermost sanctum of your heart, you will feel that new and right spirit within yourself. You will feel the return of your joy and willingness to serve. May it be so for all of you this day and always. AMEN

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