

## Sermon Year B Lent 5: Tattooing God's Love on Your Heart- Based on Jeremiah 31: 31-34 & John 12: 20-33

*Summing up our series on 'covenants' and touching on the gospel reading*

What a wonderful Old Testament Reading to close off our Lenten Focus on covenants. These weeks in Lent have provided us with snapshot stories of the history of the people of the early days of the Old Testament. God tells them "I will be your God and you will be my people." We came to understand that a covenant is a sacred agreement between 2 parties, with each party agreeing to specific terms, like a contract. We have been reading stories of the covenants, the agreements between God and God's chosen people, skipping across generations, beginning with Noah—God promises to never flood the earth again and gives the rainbow as a sign of that promise. God promises elderly Abraham and Sarah that their descendants will be a great nation and God would be with them, and in return they must obey God and as a sign of their covenant, all the men must be circumcised. Generations later, the descendants of Abraham and Sarah became slaves of the Egyptians. God chose Moses to lead the people out of slavery and across the desert to the Promised Land. God provides the people with food, water and laws by which the people can live in relationship with each other and be in relationship with God. We read about the 10 commandments and last week, how God saved the people from death after being bitten by poisonous snakes. All these stories and the lessons learned are a reminder to the Israelites of their sacred covenant with the Almighty God, describing, and reminding them that they are the God's people, that God cares for them, provides for them with food, water, and laws to guide them, known as the Torah—the laws given by God to Moses as recorded in the first five books of what we call the Old Testament. Time and time again, the Lord their God has forgiven them and saved them from themselves when they choose to fall away from living in the ways of the Lord. These stories tell us in essence **how** the people of God are to **live** as God's people.

Now, for today's Old Testament story, we've fast forwarded many more generations beyond Moses. The Israelites have long settled into the Promised Land. Many kings since that time have come and gone, including the Great King David and his son Solomon. Jeremiah writes from the time after the Babylonian invaded and conquered much of the middle-east, including the land of Israel. Here's how Bishop Terry explained it excerpted from a bible study he wrote:

The Babylonians have destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, and the people of Israel, God's chosen people, are in exile in Babylon. The people are facing a major crisis. They have lost their freedom, their way of life, their homes and their temple, which was the symbol of who and whose they were. They have lost their connection with their past, their present was oppressive and they hold little hope for their future. The big three prophets, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel, have a consistent theme. They state unequivocally that the collapse of their way of life grew out of their failure to live out the covenantal relationship with God. They failed at keeping the Torah relationship, which was about loving God and loving neighbour. Instead, they got caught up in unbridled ... (materialism); they turned Jerusalem into a gated community where the elite lived in comfort off the hard labours of the rest; and they employed militarism to feed their greed. Rather than caring for the widows, the orphans and the aliens, they exploited them. After all his words of warning and rebuke, Jeremiah now offers words of hope that their suffering, exploitation and despair would soon come to an end and God would take them home to start again. New life and new freedom would come from a renewed Torah relationship between God and God's people.<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah is prophesying about a new covenant, a new relationship, a new way of being with God. This would not be like the other one, the laws that were carved on stone tablets. Because even though the law came from God, it really didn't do what God had intended. The people wouldn't abide by the ways God chose for them to live, preferring instead to live to and for themselves. It seems God's directions to love God and love each other didn't really touch their hearts, their

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<sup>1</sup>Bishop Terry's Bible Study for 2015, Lent 5.

hearts it seems, were as hard as the tablets the commandments were carved on! Yet, God remembers God's promise to the people, and tries even another way to show them how to live as the people whom God chose to be a holy nation, an example to other nations. God will put the law *within them*, God will write the law on their hearts—all of them, regardless of who they are, God wants everyone to know God laws. **And** God will forgive them their iniquity, their wrongful ways. God just doesn't give up on these stubborn people, God keeps forgiving them and trying again and again to bring them back to holy living!

So, this got me thinking, what would that be like, to live with God's law in our hearts and then on our hearts, indelibly with us like a permanent tattoo? Then another picture came to my mind, of the 10 commandments chiselled onto a heart shaped tablet -- but I'm pretty sure that's not what God intended, a bit too hard-hearted, if you pardon the pun! So I had to give that some more thought. When we reviewed the 10 commandments 2 weeks ago, we came to realize that the commandments were relational, the first 4 commandments describe how to be in relationship with God and the next 6, how to be relationship with each other, and that they are still relevant for us today, more than 3 thousand years later. And what did Jesus say about the laws of Moses? Well, essentially he summed up the 10 commandments into 2 main concepts, 1. love the Lord your God and 2. love your neighbour. So then, to have the law of God within your heart and written on your heart would be like having your heart filled and imprinted with God's love -- guiding your life. And God's teachings impressed upon your heart. Let me say that again: *to have the law of God within your heart and written on your heart would be like having God's love in your heart, guiding your life, and the teachings literally so close to you as to be impressed upon your heart.* It would be like the Holy Spirit of God infusing your very being, to live in the freedom of God's love, instead of the dictates of our own self-centered desires and devices, or the dictates of what society keeps telling us what we should do. It would be like the joy, peace and love of God was with us at all times.

We do, sometimes, get the sense of God's love infusing us, filling us, growing within us, changing us. We are truly hardwired for that love, it is a need we all have within us, the need for love of our Creator. It's a hole that truly nothing else but the love of God can fill, one that we often try to fill in many other ways—unsuccessfully, I might add. This is truly the source of many of our addictions, like food, drugs, cigarettes, drinking, gambling—even shopping. It's hard to feel God's love some days, isn't it? The ways of the world, the pressure of cultural norms are always there, and seem to block out God's love, Jesus' forgiveness, the Spirit's guidance.

And that's why we come to church, that's why we pray, why we sing, why we share the bread and wine of holy communion, why we come together with other believers, strengthening each other as we reconnect with the love of our Creator. We have a God who continues to love us regardless of what we've done, who continues to forgive us, who continually reaches out to us, calling us back to that love. This is the God who gave us Jesus, God's son, to show us again how to live in God's love, a renewal of the old covenant, and gave us a new covenant! Jesus told the crowds who followed him as he was teaching: "Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose."

And in his dying, that's what Jesus did, he accomplished their purpose—the ultimate act of love! In his sacrifice, the world was changed, in his death, Christ was sowing the seeds that is the love of God for God's people, through his death. How? Well, not just by his death, but because of his resurrection, his coming to life again. "Because unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

And the fruit? The fruit is the love of God in Christ, in the hearts of all who believe in him. Amen

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