

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent  
Jeremiah 31:31-34  
John 12:20-33

March 21, 2021  
Psalm 51  
The Rev. Susan Plucker

### I Will Write it on Your Heart

The Hebrew scriptures (our Old Testament), can be thought of  
As stories concerning a rebellious people  
And a faithful, patient, persistent God.

Did you ever think about it that way?

I want to offer you a thumb-nail summary this morning  
To highlight that definition.  
A rebellious people and a faithful GOD.  
These are few of the stories Jesus would have heard growing up.

The story begins with God's goodness in creation  
Followed by the disobedience of Adam and Eve.  
Later we have the narrative of the unconditional covenant  
Made by God with Abraham,  
Violated repeatedly by various forms of disobedience.

God does not give up.  
God sends Moses to deliver the people of Israel  
From their slavery in Egypt.  
God gives them a new start,  
Declaring them to be the people of God  
And giving them the Ten commandments.

Before the tablets even have a chance to cool off,  
Behind Moses' back,  
The rebellious people make a golden calf to worship.

God does not give up.  
God brings them into the promised land.

What do they do?  
Continue to break the commandments,  
Especially, the first one:  
Thou shalt have no other gods but me.

Do you remember the song:  
"My Mama Told Me Not to Put Beans in My Ears?" by Len Chandler?  
(Serendipity Singers, 1964 made it a hit and then Pete Seeger a version later)  
It popped into my head as a good theme song of sorts for the Old Testament  
And for human behavior in general.

In the song, by the 4th verse we have,  
Hey, maybe it's fun to put beans in our ears...  
And Doctors at that time became alarmed  
Because so many children were actually doing that,  
Even though the song was basically about adults not listening to children.

But back to "maybe its fun to put beans in my ears"...  
It seems as soon as human creatures are told not to do something  
The urge to rebel comes creeping in and often grows to be overwhelming.

We can chalk it up to curiosity, creativity,  
The need to learn from experience, including negative experience.  
It still boils down to rebelliousness;  
Not always doing what we know is right behavior.  
Often doing what we know is wrong behavior.

Paul spoke so strongly last week in his letter to the church at Ephesus  
To our human condition  
When he said, "We were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else."  
That statement has sat in my brain all week.

So then, where is the hope for something different?  
Some other outcome?  
Some other response from we human beings?

We know the answer, but we forget and need to work through it again and again;  
this week, first, through the lens of Jeremiah.

Some time ago I recall being told that  
"Without the Hebrew prophets  
You and I would not be here in church today.  
Without the Hebrew Prophets  
The faith of Israel would have perished from the earth."

I think that that bit of wisdom is worth pondering.

That Hebrew prophet Jeremiah (born in Egypt, 653 BCE), is writing  
to comfort the people of Israel in exile.  
His message is a crucial passage TODAY for our faith journeys.

Most of what the exiles knew back in Jerusalem  
has been destroyed by pagan invaders.  
They are in Babylon now, of all places.  
They have been forced to leave Jerusalem or be killed.

Jeremiah and God are well aware that the people are seriously questioning  
Where is our God in all of this.

Is our God too weak to defend us against foreign powers and gods?  
Has our God given up on us?  
Could it be that God has finally had enough of our rebelliousness?

Jeremiah tells the people:  
The Lord has an answer to your questions and doubts  
of which you cannot even dream or conceive.

The Lord is going to do something new.  
The Lord is going to create obedience within you.

“Surely, the days are coming, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant which 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...

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... for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more”

Fleming Rutledge, one of our first woman Episcopal priests,  
and an renowned author, theologian and preacher,  
suggests that Jesus was thinking of Jeremiah’s words  
when he said at the Last Supper while holding the wine up before his followers:  
“This is my blood of the new covenant.  
which is poured out for you and for all for the forgiveness of sin.  
Drink this!”

So, how does this new covenant create obedience?  
Give us the power to move from rebelliousness  
To listening and doing God’s will?

Augustine, who lived in Roman North Africa, 354 to 430. CE,  
Wrote of his struggles to obey God’s law  
In his book, entitled Confessions.

“Oh God!” he cried,  
Make me chaste!...but not yet!”

Augustine compares the paralysis of the human will  
To being locked in a room.  
The prisoner can will to get out,  
But that’s no help.

Only the person outside with the key can set him free.  
Before his conversion  
Augustine felt that he was totally helpless  
Before the demands of God’s law.

So again, what is different about this new Covenant spoken of my Jeremiah  
And not only powerfully claimed and proclaimed  
But in-fleshed, made incarnate in Jesus, the Christ?

Does God soften the old?  
Make it easier?  
Does God announce that I used to be the mean God of the old covenant  
But have decided to be the all-forgiving God  
Of this new covenant

Does he say,  
"That's okay, Augustine,  
That's okay, Susan,  
You don't really have to follow those commandments  
About loving me and your neighbor...  
Just forget all that as past history..

Of course not!  
If anything, God, through the words and life of Jesus  
Asks even more.

Remember the Sermon on the Mount?  
Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not kill; ... but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment (Matt 5:21).  
You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy; but I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matt 5:43-44)

We're in big trouble (again)  
Until we remember what God said through Jeremiah:

I will put my law within them  
I will write it upon their hearts!

The new covenant is written in our hearts  
Written in our hearts by God...already there!  
Not through anything we did,  
But solely by the power of God,  
Flowing through Jesus, the Christ and the Holy Spirit;  
One God: creator, redeemer, sustainer.

St Patrick experienced that power.  
The Rev. Fleming Rutledge tweeted this on St. Patrick's day"

"Read the lovely testimony of St. Patrick today. "Another night I heard authoritative words which I could not understand till at the end of the speech it became clear: 'The one who gave his life for you, he it is who speaks in you'. I awoke full of joy."

Jesus in us. God in us. God words written in our hearts.

I recall so vividly a visit with the Rector of St. Paul's, Winslow, Fr. Maxwell. I had recently returned to the church with my two boys and was fraught with desire, and fear and questions. I came to him with fear and trembling to ask...is it blasphemy to think, to believe that I am experiencing God, Jesus, internally and working through me. I had basically been taught all the rules for getting into heaven. I had no idea that I was experiencing what so many before me have experienced; Jeremiah, Mary, John, Paul, Augustine, Patrick, and multitudes of others whose stories we don't know. I was afraid it might be wrong, adulterous., too ego driven, self-centered.

I will put my law within them  
I will write it upon their hearts.

This is my blood of the new covenant...  
Drink this... I am a part of you  
Eat this...

Jeremiah teaches us that God's will  
Cannot be stopped by the disobedience and sin of human beings.  
The urge for violence and revenge  
The cycle of bitterness comes to a halt  
Through the power of God working in us.

Our part is to pray.  
To pray daily that our wills be blended into God's.  
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Your will be done in me as it is in heaven.

When we seek God's will,  
God provides  
And obedience is ours as a free gift from God.

This is true prayer.  
Not prayer that God would give us things,  
Protect us from the messes we've gotten ourselves into  
Harm that person who harmed us...

No... but that simple, most powerful prayer  
Of seeking God's will  
Above all else.

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday.  
Among other scenes offered us during that liturgy  
We will reminded of how Jesus prayed in the garden  
Before his arrest.  
"Not my will, but thine be done."

In Jesus all the history of Israel is summed up;  
The entire history of rebellion.

In Jesus, the Son of God,  
The new Covenant is fulfilled.

May we, like St. Patrick,  
Awake with joy to the knowledge that  
‘The one who gave his life for you , he it is who speaks in you’.

God’s words, the way of God’s love is written in our hearts.