

Sermon – Written on Our Hearts

Scripture Readings – Jeremiah 31:31-34, Psalm 119:9-16, Luke 10:25-37

Youth Sunday, March 22, 2015

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Westminster Presbyterian Church

Springfield, Illinois

Our first scripture reading is from the book of Jeremiah, chapter 31, verses 31 through 34. In the midst of the heartbreak of exile, God speaks to the people of Israel and claims them as God's own, revealing a vision of a time when they will each know God so intimately there will be no need to teach one another the law. Hear now God's holy word.

*31 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. 32 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, says the Lord. 33 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. 34 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. Amen.*

A reading from the book of Psalms.

*9 How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word. 10 With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. 11 I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you. 12 Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes. 13 With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth. 14 I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches. 15 I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. 16 I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. Thanks be to God.*

Our gospel reading is Luke, chapter 10, verses 25 through 37. Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

*25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 27 He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And Jesus said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." 29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." This is the word of the Lord.*

The title of the sermon: Written on Our Hearts

*Reiley Duffy*

Youth Sunday is a day many of you look forward to. It is a day where we are all able to worship God in a way we are not particularly used to because you have placed your faith in us youths to put together this service.

It is also a day I have been dreading for the past four years. For those of you who don't know me well, I am terrified of public speaking. It is my least favorite thing to do. However, these past few weeks, while reading the scripture that was chosen for today, I have realized how important it is to put aside that fear and share with you what I have learned.

We all have goals in life. Some of them are big goals like college or paying off a house. Others are small, like cleaning out the gutter or starting a new hobby. Unfortunately, the most important goal we all have is the one we more often than not, forget. It is to live through God's word and God's law. This is much more difficult to do than cleaning your gutters because it is spontaneous. It is not something you can plan, and in a society that loves schedules, it can be hard to take the time and accomplish what ever God has placed before you.

This kind of spontaneity is portrayed perfectly in the parable of the Good Samaritan. A man, attacked by robbers, was left on the road, stripped of his clothes and beaten half to death. Both a priest and a Levite continued walking past when they saw him lying there. But when the Samaritan saw the man, he showed him mercy. He patched up his wounds and took care of him. This Samaritan opened his heart. And even if he didn't know it, he took one step closer to inheriting eternal life with God.

This is an important lesson because in a mere span of 15 years, we have become so dependent on technology that we are more worried about ourselves and how many likes we get on Facebook or what TV show is on that we ignore the cries for help from our hurting neighbors. We need to learn how to cleanse our lives of the distractions that are keeping us from reaching the goal of eternal life.

In Psalms 119 verse 9, it states, "How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word." This is telling us that we will be protected by God, through all of our troubles in life, if we live through God. It is sometimes so easy to let sin creep its way into our lives and to take its hold on our hearts. But that just means we need to work that much harder to stop it. We need to pray. It is hard work, but there is a saying, "Nothing good in life comes easy." Instead of hiding behind the curtain of the word we must take center stage, just as Brooke and I are today, and share what we know.

Continuing into verses 13 and 15 it reads, "With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth. I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways." The greatest aspect of any species is communication. Without it, we would be lost. With that being said, it is not good enough to live by the word, we must live *through* it. That may seem like the same thing, but living *by* the word is simply following the rules. But living *through* the word is actively showing others who we are and how we live by opening their eyes to God.

In order to fully be eligible for eternal life, we must show mercy. We must *share* our knowledge with our neighbors. You may be on center stage, but what good is a play without an audience? People with whom we can teach. We must become aware of our spontaneous goals so that when they arise we can act on them.

*Brooke Dunn*

I don't know how many people actually watch *SpongeBob Squarepants*, but there is this episode where *SpongeBob* has to write an essay. And he pretty much does everything in his power to avoid doing this assignment. Whether it was feeding his pet snail, talking to his friend Patrick, or harassing the mail man, he managed to procrastinate until 5 minutes before class started, and finished the essay like a champ. Sadly, I haven't mastered such an advanced form of procrastination...yet. But I did get pretty close writing this sermon. In my defense, the prompt I was given is a little harder. *SpongeBob* was given the topic "What not to do at a Stop Light", and I am given "The Law of God". Just a little different on the writing spectrum. As I stared endlessly at a blank sheet of paper, I came to the realization that talking about The Law of God is no simple task.

It's impossible to narrow down one specific rule that is the law, because this concept is quite abstract. Yes, there are the commandments, and specific things you clearly should or shouldn't do, but the true Law of God is through fulfillment of the spirit. In Jeremiah, it expresses the fact that the law shall be written into our hearts by the finger of spirit, rather than being written in stone. We shall all know of God, and no man shall perish, unless you are unwilling to accept Christ's Salvation. The law is love.

Above all else, God wants us to show compassion for others. It is easy for us to be full of hatred and bitterness rather than selflessness and compassion. I am only 17 years old, and I can already understand how much easier it is to be full of hatred rather than love. It has always been hard for me to forgive those who hurt me, and for a while I was very ugly. Not necessarily physically, but spiritually. There wasn't an ounce of love in my heart. I couldn't understand how people could be so hurtful, so I let that stop me from living with the Lord.

In order to fulfill this law, we have to look past these thoughts and forgive those who have hurt us. Even though I am young and naive, I have reached a certain level of acceptance for my neighbors, and I am working on loving unconditionally. What a peaceful state of mind to be in when there is no hate, just love. The concept of this Law isn't as much about simply following, but to fully submerge yourself with the Law.

We should all strive to be the Good Samaritan. It's much easier being the priest or the Levite. To walk away without taking that extra step to show compassion and selflessness. When we are able to accomplish empathy to all of our neighbors, that is where we are truly living the Law of the Lord. Just how "be safe while driving" is the whole point of *SpongeBob's* essay. The whole point of this, is to love.

*Rev. Hannah Dreitcer*

Well—what's left for me to say? But as the youth well know, a lack of things to say never keeps me from talking. As I've discussed this parable with Brooke and Reiley and heard their thoughts and read drafts of their sermons, I have been impressed again and again with the depth of their insight. I've also been impressed that they were willing to tackle the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is an incredibly well-known and iconic story. Seminarians quake at having to preach on such parables. But these ladies barely batted an eye and jumped right in, whole-heartedly. This got me thinking—what if Jesus meant the good Samaritan to be a teenager? Hear me out. A man is beaten by robbers on a dangerous road and left to die. As he lays, injured and alone, on the side of the road, two men pass by. One is a priest. One is a Levite. Both are clearly adults, people with careers, and places to be. On their way to those places, they see a man lying on the side of the road. Is he injured? Homeless? Bait?

They do the smart thing, the safe thing, and move to the other side of the road, and keep walking. I'm sure they offered up prayers on his behalf—but they were wise in the ways of the world, and foresaw the possible consequences and calculated the possible risks of stopping. Then the Samaritan comes along. In my own teenager years, my father was fond of telling me that the human brain does not fully develop until the late twenties, with the area that assesses risk and consequence at its smallest and least developed during the teen years. And this Samaritan is clearly no good at calculating risk, or considering consequences. He stops, he makes himself vulnerable, he spends all his money to help a stranger. And not just a stranger! But someone completely unlike himself, someone he has been taught and instructed to hate. Clearly, someone wasn't paying attention in school. And so I wonder also if the disciples were young. Maybe not teenagers anymore, but perhaps still with that undeveloped sense of risk to self, and inability to consider consequences. For when Jesus called them, they left their parents, and their homes, and their livelihoods with no thought for their own personal safety and well-being.

I may have joked about teenagers not paying attention in school, but I know that young people listen hard to what they're told, especially when what they're told is to love. And so they do, and in that doing, they break down the boundaries and obstacles to love that society so carefully constructs. We, those of us with fully developed brains, should pay attention. Because perhaps young people may not have the best sense of consequences for themselves (and I certainly do not encourage the overthrowing of consequence-consideration!), but I see time and time again their concern and care for others—their desire to know more, to understand—to learn new languages, to imagine what it is like to be you instead of me, to wrestle intensely and seriously with the Bible and with what it means to live as a Christian.

How can young people keep their way pure? How can young people follow God? We laughed when we saw that this was the psalm for the day, but this is the question I hear again and again in youth group. "By guarding their way according to your word"—this word, we've heard so well from Brooke and Reiley, is LOVE. So perhaps young people—and all of us—can keep our way pure and follow God by leaving our hearts unguarded, open to being changed, open to the writing of God's word upon them. We live as Christians by being vulnerable and by letting go of our fully developed sense of risk and consequences--by leaving our hearts unguarded, and open-heartedly loving God, loving our self, and loving our neighbors—even and especially those most unlike us.