

Marti McMahon Stanley
Norwalk Christian Church
March 22, 2015

They Shall All Know Me

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It 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. ³³But 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. ³⁴No 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.

A couple of weeks ago we talked about two graven tablets with written laws upon them. Infamously known to us as the Ten Commandments, they are the old covenant. What people were to live by before this new covenant was made. But the days were surely coming. And when they came they brought with them a new covenant. One that we talk about every week as we gather around the table. One that is unlike most covenants. A covenant that changes how we view God, as well as our relationship with God. A covenant that gives us hope and freedom. A covenant that notices and appreciates individual beauty.

You may find it odd that we use the old liturgical phrase, “This is my blood. The blood of a new covenant. A covenant you may deny, but one that you can never break.” That phrase has been used around communion tables for centuries. People throughout various countries and time periods have reflected upon those words. And it is with good reason and intentionality that it is said as we gather together as the body of Christ, as we gather together worshipping God.

This old covenant, this list of rules, wasn’t being kept and probably was often misunderstood. Not the rules, but the reason behind the rules. The love and compassion of a god who would provide safety in

rules was overshadowed by the do and do-not's. God became viewed as a legalist that could smite at any moment. The motivation behind keeping the covenant wasn't what God wanted for God's people.

For God is not the Old Testament vengeful angry God we think of. God is not present to judge our every thought or movement. God is not there to make sure we follow all the rules. Instead, God has given us a freedom to be able to express ourselves in different ways. We no longer have to simply make sure we follow ten rules and go to temple. We no longer have to sit and be told about God from others. We get to experience God ourselves. Our text today says the new law is written on our hearts. It is instilled in us, it is a part of us. It is in all that we do and all that we love. And it is there whether we like it or not. Whether we feel worthy or not. They are within us. Not something we can run away from. Not something we can tear down or destroy. Not something we can easily ignore. God is with us. We are loved.

At times I have our youth and children play large group games. Sometimes they are divided up according to age, but other times I have to get creative and divide them up according to the month they were born or according to eye color. Something that is controlled. I divide them up this way for two reasons. One, I want them to feel comradery. Even if it's something silly like all having the same eye color or birth month, there's a sense of belonging in that. And two, because I've witnessed seeing the look on faces when I've picked captains and had them choose their teammates one at a time. I've seen the look of the last person being picked. I've seen how they don't feel like they belong. I've seen them try extra hard to prove themselves and I've seen the look of utter failure in their eyes when they don't succeed. I never want to put anyone through that. So I have changed how I divide teams. And I think God is the same way.

Perhaps God is a lot like us. Perhaps God tried God's best, setting up rules for us that provided us safety and unity among each other. Yet later, in its execution, God saw the pain in someone's eyes and the hurt in their heart and realized that isn't the best way to go about it and changed how things were done. God loves us. We are God's beloved. God does not want us to feel like we don't belong or that we aren't wanted. Just as I want to make sure with our youth that this place is a safe place, that is always welcoming and accepting. Never a

place that brings about hurt or unworthiness or betterment. God is that same way. God doesn't want us to feel like an utter failure when we try our best to impress and we don't succeed. God wants us to know we belong. We do have a place. We are enough. And the unique passions instilled within each of us is a part of God. It is good. We are good. And that goodness will never be taken away. Even if we deny its existence, it will never be broken. God is with us, written on our hearts.

And we no longer have to learn about God from other people. We get to experience God ourselves. We get to experience love. We get to experience grace. We have hope. And in this period of Lent as we continually better ourselves for God's work, it is invaluable that we know that our best is good enough. It is invaluable that we do God's work in this world. That we continue to follow our passions, using our gifts and bringing the love of Christ into this world.

In our world today we compete for almost everything. We compete in sports, we compete in academics, we compete for love, we compete in the work field, some of us don't know quite when to stop competing. We think we have to win, we have to get it all right in order to have it all, to gain respect, to be who we want to be. And in the process we put unnecessary pressure on ourselves to be unrealistic people. I admit I put that pressure on myself. In interacting with people both young and old, in parenting, in being a spouse, in being an employee, a neighbor, a friend, a daughter, a sister, I am constantly putting unrealistic expectations on myself. We all do. And we transfer those feelings on to God. We think we aren't good enough to receive God's goodness, God's forgiveness, God's attention, because we aren't perfect. We deny our gifts and calling or dismiss their importance. We forget that God has claimed us. And once God has claimed us, it's done. We are God's. Whether we feel deserving or not. Whether we have picked up our gifts or answered our calling. God has claimed us.

God is our God and we are God's people. The day has come. The new law is written on your heart. It is no longer displayed on graven images to be placed somewhere for people to look at. It is now displayed through your love, through your actions. The love and passion within you has been put there by God. Follow your passions, taste and see God's glorious richness. Recognize your value during

this Lenten season as you dream about your ministries and prepare for the ministries ahead. God is your God, and you are God's people. They shall all know me, the days are surely coming.