

Healing as release...releasing our distractions
Jeremiah 31.31-34; John 12.20-33

“I will put My law within them and write it on their hearts.” I will put my *torah*, My Word, inside of you. And I will write It on your hearts.”

This is what Jeremiah sees, and hears. The Law of God, the Law that was given at Mt. Sinai, the Law that was mediated through Moses, this, this is the Law that will be placed inside of us. That will be written onto our hearts. There will be no priest to mediate the Word of God. It won't be kept in the Temple. And it won't be written on tablets or scrolls, but onto our hearts. No scribes will write out this law. No, God will write it. And God will be put it within us, alongside our other internal organs! A living Law!

This is surely an image of incarnation. Jeremiah saw and heard God's promise that God's Word would be made flesh. And when we see Jesus, we see what it looks like when God's Law is made flesh.

God's promise for the house of Jacob is a big promise. In response to a people who were completely and repeatedly unfaithful, a people who again and again broke God's heart, God refuses to be finished with them. God's heart, though broken, is still a heart of love. And God loves the house of Jacob with a love so powerful, so profound, so big that it will not and cannot be thwarted. God's heart *IS* love.

In response to our broken covenant, in response to our repeated faithlessness, to our broken relationships with God and with each other, God comes to us again and again with a heart wide-open, extending love. “I will be their God and they will be My people.... You will know Me, from the least to the greatest. And I will forgive your guilt and your sin, I won't remember anymore.”

There is so much grace and so much mercy in this promise that it's hard for us to fully comprehend it. But when we see Jesus, we begin to understand. From the heart of God to

the heart of Jesus we begin to see what it looks like to have a heart of love, a heart that beats with the living Word. We learn something about the quality and character of God's love—it is forgiving, already forgiving. In these beautiful words from Jeremiah, we hear that God promises to forgive...and to forget...in the future! God's love is shaped by forgiveness, by mercy, by grace. And it is completely indifferent to our response. No matter what we do, God's heart of love, shaped by forgiveness, is in our future.

“I will put My Law within them. And I will write It on your hearts.” I want to examine these ancient words a bit. The Hebrew word for *within* could be translated as *guts, or internal organs, or womb*. In other words, God is putting *torah* into our bellies. I'm highlighting this so that we get a sense of the physicality of the promise. It isn't metaphorical; it's bodied. “And I will write it onto your hearts.” This is metaphor. While we may know and think of the heart as an internal organ, in the Hebrew Bible, rarely does the word *heart* refer to the organ. Usually the word is translated as *inner person, or mind, will*, that part of our being that's intangible. This promised incarnation of God's Law is both physical and spiritual; it will permeate our bodies and beings and en flesh the fullness of our humanity.

And we see this when we see Jesus. God's Word has been written into his body and being, onto his humanity. His heart and God's heart are of the same mind, the same will, the one Spirit.

I don't know if you're like me, but in my default thinking, I have this sense that the incarnation was easy for Jesus. That it was effortless for him while here we are, struggling to let our hearts be tuned by God's heart. But I wonder....

In the John passage we hear Jesus teaching about being glorified, and grains of wheat dying, that in dying finding life. That being glorified is a result of dying. Jesus wasn't born knowing this. And he doesn't know it because he was born with the Word of God already

written on his heart. Rather, Jesus knows about dying and living and being glorified because he learned it through experience. He lived through the experience of having God write on his heart. With every year and every encounter, Jesus practiced releasing his heart and letting God's heart shape the encounter. In each encounter, Jesus chose to let go of his reactions, his will, his desires, instead responding with the love given him from God's heart. Again and again, Jesus practiced responding and engaging with love, love shaped by forgiveness, mercy, grace. And surely God was writing on Jesus heart in the wilderness. During those 40 days and 40 nights Jesus was losing his heart. And finding God's heart. And the fruit of Jesus' life was abundant! Is abundant!

“Those who love their *life* will lose it and those who hate their *life* will find it.” Most Bibles translate this verse the same. But when this passage is read alongside the Jeremiah passage, we see and hear something new. The word that's translated as *life* could also be translated as *soul*, or *spirit*, *innermost being*, *will*, *mind*. Jesus isn't talking about our organs shutting down and dying, he's talking about losing our hearts in order to find the heart of God. Losing our hearts so that God's heart shapes our being and our living.

And losing our hearts is work that happens in the wilderness. The wilderness is a place away from all the distractions that keep us holding onto our own hearts. In the wilderness we are brought face to face with the futility and emptiness of those distractions. And here I'm not talking about the obvious and perhaps petty distractions; I'm talking about the distractions of good ideas and good projects, the distractions of wanting to fix the world, of wanting to impose my agenda and my right ideas and beliefs on people and problems. The distractions of *my* mind, *my* will, my ego. And over time, as the work of the wilderness forms us, we begin to recognize those things in our lives that are distracting us from the one true thing. And we release them.

When Jesus was in the wilderness, the temptations were distractions from *his* purpose. “Turn these stones to bread.” When so many were poor and hungry...this must have been a compelling distraction. Or being offered political or Temple leadership? Imagine what Jesus could have done when so many were oppressed and suffering?! But Jesus kept letting go of his heart, opening himself, letting God inscribe his heart with a living Law, a Law written with love, a Law shaped by forgiveness and mercy and grace. A completely non-coercive Law. A Law that heals us and frees us, transforms and saves us.

When we see Jesus, his living and being appear to be effortless. But Jesus was fully human and it was hard for him too. (We get a window into that in this John passage.) Jesus, the son of humanity, gave himself to the full experience of being human. With the living Word written into his being, he experienced an aliveness that only comes from releasing our hearts and our lives so that God’s heart is alive in us. It is that aliveness that made everyone want to be near him. That makes us want to keep seeing Jesus. That keeps healing us and saving us.

Losing our heart isn’t a one-time event. As we live, we keep releasing and losing our hearts. It was true for Jesus, as well. Just because the heart of God was giving life to him didn’t mean that his own heart wasn’t distracting him. In v 27 we hear, “My heart is agitated, and what shall I say? ‘Father, rescue Me from this hour?’” Here we see Jesus’ heart, disturbed, struggling with what’s in front of him.

It’s easy for the poetry and familiarity of this imagery to become a distraction and miss what is happening here. Jesus is giving us a glimpse into the power of resurrection, into the power of God’s love and forgiveness.

Even so, Jesus is struggling. And he tells the disciples, “My heart is troubled.” What a gift to them...and to us! This stuff is not easy. It’s hard when our hearts are in turmoil. But

the Law of God has been forming Jesus, and it is written into his body and being, into his life. The Law isn't something Jesus does, it's who he *is*. When we see Jesus and hear the teachings, we *see* and hear the heart of God.

And what seems impossible, Jesus makes possible. Jesus points the disciples to his death and resurrection. Listen, "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all *peoples* to Myself." "When I am lifted up from the earth" is an image of both crucifixion and resurrection.

We think of crucifixion being bad and being outside of God's heart. And at some level that is surely true. It was hate and rivalry and violence that killed Jesus. That is still crucifying Jesus. But in the resurrection that Jesus is pointing us to, we see what Jeremiah saw: "I will forgive their guilt and won't remember their sins." God's heart is already enveloping these sins, this violence...just as God's heart is already forgiving our sins and violence.

The heart of God that is shaped by love and grace and mercy cannot be diminished or undone. The non-coercive and non-violent love of God is always and forever more powerful than hate and violence and any other form of evil. And that's what we see in resurrection. The miracle isn't just that the heart of God is alive in dying and death, the miracle is that the living God loves through it all.

This is Jeremiah's vision. And this is what Jesus lived. God's Law will be placed within us and written onto our hearts. It is a living Law! A forgiving Law! It is our hope and it is our future.

May we hold on to this promise...releasing the distractions of our hearts...as God inscribes His Law onto our hearts...placing Her heart into us.