

Week One: Love God with All Your Heart

Sunday, April 1, 2018

by: Rev. Roger Lenander

“But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. “ John 20:11

Someone once informed me that to give your heart to someone is inviting suffering into your life. What they meant was that relationships built on love are vulnerable to being broken in various ways. For many, like Mary, it is standing at the graveside of a loved one. The tears flow freely, but the meaning behind those tears is yet to be discovered. For the tears are for more than the death of the loved one. In the coming days they can unearth new emotions behind those tears.

Jesus tells us that being in relationship with God is to love with all your heart. With joy and sorrow, in life and death, to love God without holding anything back. At the tomb Mary has yet to learn in the death of Jesus the depth of God’s love for the world. We know that God will not leave Mary to live in that moment for the rest of her life. So there will come another message, “He is not here. He is Risen just as He said.” And tears of sadness become tears of eternal joy. And our joy is that God is doing the same in your life.

I thank you, O Lord, for in n the emptiness of the tomb you change my mourning into gladness, my despair into shouts of joy. Amen.

Monday, April 2, 2018

by: Misty Coyle

²⁹⁻³¹ Jesus said, “The first in importance is, ‘Listen, Israel: The Lord your God is one; so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.’ And here is the second: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ There is no other commandment that ranks with these.”

Mark 12:29-30 (MSG)

Love. There are few things so universal and yet so challenging. Love for God. “The first in importance”, says Jesus, and one that both the old and new covenants portray as necessary.

Let's say you have the greatest physique. In essence, you stand as an incredible specimen of the human race, because you sculpted your body day in and day out at the gym. But what good is all of that muscle if you have heart disease? You may look good on the outside, but if your heart is diseased and sickened, your physique will not do you one bit of good.

In the same way, you can look like an incredible Christian attending church, reading your Bible, and praying, but your heart is spiritually diseased with a lack of love for God, what good it that? The love of God and the love for God is a verb. How do you show the love of God to others?

Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God expressed His love for us from every fiber of His being. The very least we can do is to love Him back with all of our heart.

Holy God, may our hearts be opened to your works and our hands do your work. Amen, so be it!

Tuesday, April 3, 2018

by: Juel Pierce

Mark’s story of the discovery of the empty tomb by Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome leaves us...empty. They went to the tomb with a task: to anoint Jesus’ body for burial. Their

mind was full of their task, and a question, “Who will roll away the stone?” When they saw that the stone was rolled back, and not Jesus, but a young man dressed in a white robe, their hearts were full not of joy, but “they were alarmed.” And when they heard the young man’s explanation that Jesus had been raised, they were not comforted, but “they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

I remember a time when Jim’s family got together and went to see the tombs where their ancestors were laid. We found the graves and left satisfied. All was as we expected: the graves were undisturbed, and the ancestors were where we expected. Jim and I had a different experience when we went to Denmark to look for the graves of some of my ancestors. We found the churches and the churchyards, but the graves are unknown to us: Denmark is a small country with a long history of people dying, and unlike many cemeteries in America, there is no “perpetual care”; after the immediate family of the person has died and no longer caring for the grave, someone else is buried in the grave and their family takes care of the more recently deceased’s grave. We didn’t find the graves of my ancestors; just lots of graves with people of the same or similar last names, and some of them could be my ancestors, but we didn’t know who.

I was not afraid, and didn’t flee from the cemetery, because even though I didn’t know exactly where my ancestors’ bodies were, I was pretty sure they were somewhere in those churchyards. And yet, what I know even more is that they with Jesus, in the resurrection. How do I know? Because their faithful trust in Jesus was passed down in our family, and my parents had me baptized and fulfilled the promises they made for me when I was baptized that they would take me to church, teach me the faith, and encourage my growth in faith.

I know that I am destined also for the grave. Where I’m buried matters less to me than it will to my children and grandchildren, because they sometime might want to see where my body is buried.

I love this body that God has given to me, with all its failings and faults. But even more I know that the body I have now is but a seed of what will be. As Paul says, “What is sown is perishable. . . .It is raised a spiritual body.” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44) I don’t know what that means exactly, but we live in bodies that have the promise of the victory over death, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Loving God, may our emptiness be filled with hope, as we participate in the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Wednesday, April 4, 2018

by: Jim Pierce

*One of the scribes came near . . . and asked [Jesus], ‘Which commandment is the first of all? Jesus answered, ‘Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; **you shall love the lord your God with all your heart**, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12: 28—30, NRSV, emphasis added)*

How do we love God with all our heart? More, how CAN we love God with all our heart and still have room enough to love all else that is dear to us—family, those life-time friends, those things that bring us great joy and pleasure, our own lives? Does this first great commandment really ask us to put our love for all these aside to love only God? If that’s the choice before us, can any of us make that choice?

Those are questions that dwell deep in our scarcity oriented, possession-oriented minds, or, not speaking for you, at least in mine. Don't I have only so much love? If I give it all to God, I will have none left for anyone, anything else. If I give even some of my love to others, then I can't give it all to God. If that's what it comes down to, am I willing to do it?

Well, no, I'm not willing. Not when I begin at that starting point. But what other starting point is there? Ahhh, perhaps the mystery laid bare in this text, this great commandment, is that only in loving God with all my heart am I truly able to love all else that is dear to me.

Perhaps the mystery laid bare here is that only when my heart is truly turned fully to God who first loves me, only then can God's great love flow fully into my life, and then through my life to others. Without God's love flowing through me my love is a strong cord, binding those I love to me—my wife, my children, my life. But when love connects me to God, I discover that each of these is not mine, to love or not, but God's. In that love, I discover that each of these belong to God and that the love God gives them through me is one that frees, empowers, encourages the other as only the heart of God, the love of God can.

May our prayer today be: *God, help me to love you fully, with all my heart so that with all your love in my heart I can truly love others. Amen*

Thursday, April 5, 2018

by: Phil Hornbostel

3 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? **2** You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. **3** You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

4 Such confidence we have through Christ before God. **5** Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. **6** He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

The Greater Glory of the New Covenant

7 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, **8** will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? **9** If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! **10** For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. **11** And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

12 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. **13** We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. **14** But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. **15** Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. **16** But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. **17** Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. **18** And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate^[a] the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3 New International Version (NIV)

From our viewpoint, as “resurrection people” when we profess to “love the Lord thy God with all our heart”, we are quite correct to envision Jesus. When Paul wrote back to the church in Corinth, he expressed concern that the people expected some sort of “letter of reference” from Jerusalem to verify his status as a minister of the Gospel in their midst. Paul finds this expectation not so much disappointing as amusing: “Don’t you know that your love of Christ is my “letter of reference”? Don’t you understand that pen and ink, like tablets of the law, reflect only restrictions, and condemnations? Don’t you understand that through Christ, we have a new covenant based in love, and that Gospel news is the source of your salvation?”

Paul goes on with this comparison of Old Testament (“old covenant”) and New Testament (“new covenant”) in verses 15-18, to explain that in Jesus we are free to share *all* our emotions of love without restraint. We have been freed to truly love with *all* our heart, and not feel constrained to worship in stony reverence. We can, boldly and without reservation, “sing to the Lord a new song!”

Jesus, the love of my heart, I am so happy today to call myself your own, and to share in the joy of your Resurrection. Give me the sense of freedom in this Easter season to worship you with ALL my heart and to share this joy with all my sisters and brothers in Christ. Amen

Friday, April 6, 2018

by: Jeff Langdon

Emptied to Love God with all you Heart- Mark 16:1-8

After the Sabbath (which occurs on Saturdays), Mark tells us that women came to where Jesus had been buried to anoint his body with spices. These are things his close disciples should have done, but it is interesting that Mark describes Jesus' female followers as often displaying more faith and courage than the male followers.

It seems though that they did not plan ahead, because on their way they ask each other, “Who will move the stone from the opening for us”... or where are the men who can help us. Rather coincidentally the stone is already moved. Jesus is not there! **The tomb has been emptied.**

I read somewhere that for Mark, and his gospel account, miraculous signs do not serve to facilitate faith... but rather signs appear when you already have faith ... they really hold no power to persuade when you don't have faith or belief.

So, the emptied tomb isn't so much proof of Jesus' resurrection, but it is a symbol that Jesus has emptied the power of death, and the power that death has over God's creation. It is a symbol that Love has triumphed over darkness.

In Mark, the white clad figure doesn't invite the women to look into the tomb, and the women apparently take his word that the tomb is emptied. Instead the women are directed to turn their attention away from the tomb and towards the future. A future, that after all they experienced, would be foundational to a new belief system.

The proclamation of the Church and our faith is based on this belief... that **Christ is Risen**... this is the basis of our faith and is simply believed. Our faith is not based on any empirical or historical evidence of the tomb being emptied. Our faith is based on the belief that God loved the world so much that Jesus was given in our place. Our faith is based on the belief that Love wins over darkness. Our response is then a choice to love as Christ loved us. A choice to love God with all our heart.

So, the celebration of Easter for us then is a reminder that we too have been emptied... emptied by faith... emptied to be the people that God created us to be... emptied to love what God has created... We are a people changed by the resurrection, a people changed by faith... a people changed to be a reflection of God's love for the world. We now go to live in faith, emptied for all that God has intended.... and to love God with all our heart.

Dear God, your Son emptied Himself for us. Fill us with your love so that we too can be emptied to be a reflection of your love. Help us to love you with all our heart. Amen

Saturday, April 7, 2018

by: Rev. Roger Lenander

"Create in me a clean heart, O God." Psalm 51:10

I grew up in a household that was welcoming. There was always room at the table at mealtime for one more. Many times we had people staying with us when they had no where else to go. I realized later in life that the seed of welcoming the stranger was planted by those experiences my parents provided. I give thanks each day because that generosity still guides my life and relationships with friends and stranger.

I know that not everyone grew up in such a household. Strangers were to be kept at a distance for fear of the disruption in their life's comfort or the drain of personal resources. In this psalm is the prayer for God to wash away the consumption with self and to create a new heart that welcomes the stranger. A prayer for a heart to trust in God's provision. A heart that brings us closer to our divine brothers and sisters.

Renew in me a right spirit, my Lord and Savior. Amen.