

SERMON – The Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 25, 2012

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 119:9-16

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:2-33

There is change going on all around us every day. There is much happening in the world, both here at home and far away; some good, and some not so good. But spring is in the air, the weather is changing, the days are getting longer, and our allergies are acting up. I think spring is a season we all love because spring is about resurrection. Resurrection comes after death as we watch new life in our plants, we see the birds chirping as they build new nests for the birth of their young ones, the trees are beautiful with their blossoms, just look outside and see. There is a feeling of anticipation and Hope as we see all this happening around us after the long cold dark days of winter.

This leads us right into the Gospel today as on this Fifth and last Sunday in Lent we come to a crucial point in Jesus' life here on earth. *Jesus has to face Jerusalem.* Does Jesus want to go through with this plan that God has for him? The human side of Jesus certainly does not, but the Divine side of Jesus knows that he will obey his Father. Jesus is telling the people that his time here on earth is coming to an end, and he likens his death to that of a grain of wheat; unless the wheat falls into the earth and dies it will not bear much fruit. Jesus tells us that we too have to die to our old ways in order to bring forth a new life in Christ. Holy Week into Easter very clearly demonstrates the story of the grain of wheat, as we see how Jesus has to die in order to bring forth new life through the Resurrection. Our baptism also demonstrates how we have to put away our old ways as we take on a new life in Christ. The penitential season of Lent teaches us to look deep within ourselves so that we can get rid of those things that keep us from completely loving God. In order for us to grow in fertile ground, we have to give up some of our old ways in order to live and bear much fruit. Jesus assures us that whoever serves him must follow him and whoever serves him, the Father will honor.

Throughout history, there are many people who have died in the name of Jesus, but this does not mean that their ministry died with them. The good they started in helping others continue on long after they have gone as their work continues to bear much fruit.

Over the past four Sundays, and again today, God has made various Covenants with God's people. We heard about the Rainbow and the promise God made to never again flood the earth; then there was the Covenant God made with Abraham that he will be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. We heard about the Laws, or Commandments, that God gave to Moses, and last week we heard about the healing of the people. All these Covenants assure us of God's unfailing Love.

Today's passage from Jeremiah tells us that God is making yet a new Covenant with the houses of Israel and Judah, and with all God's people. The new Covenant is that God will engrave the law on the hearts of the people. Notice where God engraves his love for us, right on our heart and not in our head? The heart is where Love and compassion flow from, it is not a head thing; we do not love with our head. It is indeed very clear that God wants to have a relationship with humankind and God will do whatever it takes to establish this relationship. God realizes that we can break Laws, so by writing this new Covenant of Love on the heart of God's people, God is saying loud and clear that "***I will be your God and you will be my people.***" God even says that he will forgive and forget all our iniquities. What an example we are to set for the rest of the world; we too are to forgive each other, and then we are to forget about it, we are to learn to wipe the slate clean. God does not forsake us and because God first loved us we are able to change our ways in order to make a fresh start as we commit to a personal relationship with God.

God has done everything to get our attention, and the Psalmist is responding to God's new Covenant by saying, "***I treasure your promise in my heart, that I may not sin against you. My delight is in your statutes; I will not forget your word.***" When we too hear again how God has not given up on us, our hearts are opened to receive and accept this wondrous love that is so freely given.

You may have noticed that we had a choice of two Psalms this morning and we chose to read Psalm 119:9-16. Did you know that Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm and it is structured so that every section is named for a letter of the Hebrew alphabet? The section we read this morning is the second section of the Psalm which is 'Beth' in Hebrew. If you look in your Bibles you will see that each section is marked with the Hebrew alphabet.

The Son of Man is being glorified in the Father; Jesus is the High Priest who is able to offer eternal salvation to those who obey him. Here again, in Hebrews, we hear of Jesus' upcoming agony as he is faced with what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem. Jesus learned to be obedient to God even through his suffering; *what a lesson to us.* When we are faced with difficult times we too are allowed to throw up our hands and cry out to God. But we should know that deep within us, our faith carries us through the times, and we learn to trust that God hears our cries of pain as God leads us through the difficult times.

As we look back on Jesus' time on earth, we remember all the things Jesus has taught us; we re-live the miracles, the healings, and the new ways he taught us how to live by loving and caring for each other. We honor what Jesus has done for us and for the world, as we go marching into Holy Week.

In my Sermon on the First Sunday in Lent, I invited us to take a walk with Jesus in the Wilderness for the next 40 days as we learned to face all the things that confront us on such an experience. If we have been trying to lead a disciplined Lent, how has this experience been for you? Did reading an inspirational book help us to look more

deeply within ourselves; did giving up something that we like help to make us realize that we really can do without that special thing; or did we take on something new that will bring us closer to God? Was this Lent more meaningful for us than any other Lent? If so, what was the difference? Whatever we did, I hope it was enlightening and inspiring and that we were able to rid ourselves of those distractions that may have been keeping us away from God. Engaging in a Lenten discipline can be a powerful experience.

Next week we will celebrate Palm Sunday, and things are changing very rapidly between then and Easter. With brave and humble hearts we will re-live what Jesus went through on his final days on earth; the Son of God is fulfilling his mission on earth. In Holy Week our liturgical color will change from purple, the season of penitence, to red, the color of blood. We will wave palms and shout 'Hosanna in the Highest', then we will listen to the Passion and shout 'Crucify Him.' On Maundy Thursday we will meet for a 'Love' meal and in our Worship Service we will focus on the Cross and re-enact Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. We will be asked to 'Keep Watch' for the next 12-14 hours, and hopefully we *will* do better than the disciples did by staying awake. At Midday on Good Friday we read about the Crucifixion of Jesus, and at the evening Worship Service we will read meditations written by members of the congregation on the last Seven Words of Jesus. On Easter Morn to sing 'Alleluia's' for the Risen Christ.

I have just given you a synopsis of what will take place starting from Palm Sunday on through Holy Week. My telling you what will happen cannot begin to compare to what it feels like to experience all these Services for yourself. I would truly like to encourage those who can to join us for all the Holy Week Worship Services; and then experience the true Joy of the Empty Tomb on Easter. So, please let us take this journey together; let us open our hearts to God's Love as we embrace the fullness of Holy Week and Easter.

As we think about all the events of the past 40 days and what they mean to us, we accept Christ's call to restore our relationship with God and with each other. To follow Christ is to live an abundant life, a life that is meaningful and is filled with peace, love, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, joy, and self-control. As we gather here each week, we are fed through our sincere Worship of God; we are fed when we receive the Body and Blood of Christ at the Table; we are fed when we take and use God's Word as our guide for living; we are fed when we have fellowship with each other; and all this leads us out into the community to share God's Love with others as we do ministry.

As our Faith grows we recognize that there is nothing we can do to earn God's Love as Jesus has already paid this price for us. God calls us into relationship as he engraves his love on our hearts, and forgives and forgets all our sins. This is indeed a true blessing from God. We walk together as Children of God and we are strengthened to live in Faith, loving and caring for each other as God loves and cares for us.

May our Holy Week be a Blessed one as we continue our journey together.

Amen