

Jeremiah 17:5-10 ~ Luke 6:17-26 (The Message Bible)
The Way of the Heart – Part 1
 February 13, 2022 ~ 6th Sunday after Epiphany ~ Souper Bowl of Caring
 The Rev. Dr. Laurie Brubaker Davis

Introduction to First Scripture Lesson:

Which way does your heart turn? Does it turn toward God or does it turn away? The writer of this “Psalm of Contrasts” that you are about to hear is warning Judah very plainly about the perils of trying to run their lives on their own. Things were going badly for them and they were about to get much worse. Quite possibly these verses were aimed at Zedekiah, since his turning away from God and his alliance with Egypt were largely responsible for the Babylonian invasion in about 587 BCE.

However, the question remains for us to answer today and every day of our lives: Which way does your heart turn? Our choices to turn away from God may not cause a whole nation to be destroyed and captured, but they can be very destructive in other important ways. Let us now choose to open our hearts to the truth of this text—both its warning and its comfort, as I read Jeremiah 17, verses 5 – 10.

Introduction to Second Scripture Lesson:

Last week’s gospel story began with Jesus’ fishing advice to Simon Peter, “Put out into the deep water,” (Luke 5:4) that quickly resulted in a haul of fish so large, their boats were nearly swamped. Then came the conversation between Peter and Jesus that became a call to a new way of life, “From now on you will be catching people.” So they left their sinking (and soon to be stinking) boats overflowing with the catch of their lives, and went off to God knew where to do God know what. They had no idea. Who was this Jesus who had such incredible power to heal and preach and teach? Whoever he was, he kept surprising, offending and amazing everyone by breaking rules, healing all kinds of people, and even calling a despised tax collector to be one of his disciples. He’ll take anyone, apparently.

After a whole night of prayer on the mountain, we are told in Luke 6:12, Jesus called his twelve disciples and here’s what came next. We have come to call it, the “Sermon the Plain.”

Sermon

We know them. We depend on them. We call them out on cold, rainy, snowy Wisconsin nights. Who am I talking about? The pizza delivery dude. That’s who Professor Sarah Adams chose to write about in the collection of essays *This I Believe*, published in 2007. She wrote, “If I have one operating philosophy about life it is this: “Be cool to the pizza delivery dude; it’s good luck.”

But there’s more to it, than just luck. This belief system of hers has four basic principles. “*Principle 1: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in **humility and forgiveness**. I let him cut me off in traffic, let him safely hit the exit ramp from the left lane, let him forget to use his*

blinker without extending any of my digits out the window or towards my horn because there should be one moment in my harried life when a car may encroach or cut off or pass and I let it go. Sometimes when I have become so certain of my ownership of my lane, daring anyone to challenge me, the pizza dude speeds by me in his rusted Chevette...As he journeys, I give safe passage, practice restraint, show courtesy, and contain my anger.

*Principle 2: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in **empathy**. Let's face it: We've all taken jobs just to have a job because some money is better than none. I've held an assortment of these jobs and was grateful for the paycheck that meant I didn't have to share my Cheerios with my cats. In the big pizza wheel of life, sometimes you're the hot bubbly cheese and sometimes you're the burnt crust. It's good to remember the fickle spinning of that wheel.*

*Principle 3: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in honor and it reminds me to honor **honest** work. Let me tell you something about these dudes: They never took over a company and, as CEO, artificially inflated the value of the stock and cashed out their own shares, bringing the company to the brink of bankruptcy, resulting in 20,000 people losing their jobs while the CEO builds a home the size of a luxury hotel. Rather, the dudes sleep the sleep of the just.*

*Principle 4: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in **equality**. My measurement as a human being, my worth, is the pride I take in performing my job — any job — and the respect with which I treat others. I am the equal of the world not because of the car I drive, the size of the TV I own, the weight I can bench press, or the calculus equations I can solve. I am the equal to all I meet because of the kindness in my heart. And it all starts here — with the pizza delivery dude.ⁱ*

Humility, forgiveness, empathy, truth, equality (emboldening of these words was mine): Definitely sounds like she's picking up what Jesus was putting down on in his Sermon on the Plain that day to the large, mixed crowd of his disciples and people from all over. As he began to lay out his basic principles, Jesus was not holding back. Like the scene in his hometown synagogue: he told them the truth in all its comfort and its challenge. We'll get to hear the rest of Jesus' fiery sermon next Sunday.

You are probably more familiar with Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount" which uses essentially the same source material as Luke. But Luke's is scarier. He continues to push the theme of economic reversal that we heard from Mary, Jesus' mother, before he was born in Luke 1, then again when Jesus was in the synagogue in Luke 4, and now again, with his new recruits, on the plain. Telling them flat out: Don't trust your eyes or your head if you want to follow God. God wants you to open your heart and trust God to lead you by the heart.

As Marcus Borg taught us in his book titled *The Heart of Christianity*: "In the Bible and the Christian tradition, the "heart" is a metaphor for a deep level of the self, a level below our thinking, feeling, and willing, our intellect, emotions, and volition. The heart is thus deeper than our "head," deeper than our conscious self and the ideas we have in heads. Faith concerns this deeper level of the self. Faith is the way of the heart, not the way of the head... Faith as trust as radical trust in God. Significantly, it does not mean trusting in the truth of a set of statements

about God, that would be *assensus*. Rather it means trusting in God.”ⁱⁱ That trust is the key to engaging in God’s work to save the world.

And indeed, that takes courage. But here’s the good news: God has planted exactly that kind of courage deep inside of you, waiting every day to be ignited. “Alice Walker wrote: ‘Helped are those who find the courage to do at least one small thing each day to help the existence of another—plant, animal, river, or human being. They shall be joined by a multitude of the timid.’ That is how we get going on living into Jesus’ way that he was preaching about on the plain that day. As Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis explains how even you and I can do this, “A movement to build a more just society begins with little steps taken by good people every day. Humankind desperately needs a love revolution that leads to equality and equity, to the end of white supremacy once and for all. You have the power to be an agent of change in your everyday living; you can influence your posse to also be the change you seek. And ultimately, together, in community, small steps can lead to morally courageous behavior that loves the world all the way to healing.”ⁱⁱⁱ

What about us at FPC? What about you wherever you are in your life, right now? What small step are you being called to take this week? The answer is different for everyone. Perhaps it’s a hard conversation you haven’t had the courage yet to begin. Or maybe it’s a choice you know you need to make but have been resisting. It could be something you need to stop doing. Or maybe something you need to start trying to do. You will have a chance to listen to your heart and let God speak to you as we sing together our sermon hymn, “Blest are They” in a few moments.

One small step that Carmen and I are inviting *all of you* to consider (and are thanking those who have already taken this step) is to “Share a bit of yourself” with a short piece from your heart, to add to our Lenten Daily Devotional booklet for 2022. What we have received so far is amazing! I hesitate to say this, because I fear it could ignite either a feeling of intimidation, “Oh no, mine wouldn’t be good” or fire up the old competitive spirit, “Wait ‘til you see mine, it will be the best!” This is not the Super Bowl of Devotion Writing, first step and you’re there: You will have already made the touchdown at the snap. Nor will Olympic gold, silver, and bronze be awarded.

As Jesus said in Luke, (according to Eugene Peterson’s rendering in The Message Bible), “your task is to be true, not popular.” (Luke 6:26) And only you can be true to your heart. I will encourage you with the words from a famous doctor:

Today you are you, that is truer than true.

There is no one alive who is Youer than you.

Thank you, Dr. Seuss. Your verses ring with gospel truth. The gold medal of being you is yours for the taking and for the giving. Whether you are in the sanctuary today, or viewing our service from afar: Do all of us the gift of sharing a bit of yourself with us this Lent. We welcome online submissions, heartily!

The question at the heart of it is this: Whom do you *really* trust? There are many forces competing for control of your heart and soul and mind. There's a great scene in Oscar Wilde's play *Salome* when King Herod receives reports that Jesus of Nazareth has been raising the dead. "I do not wish him to do that," cried Herod. "I forbid him to do that. I allow no man to raise the dead. This man must be found and told that I forbid him to raise the dead." What a familiar sound, the bluster of a tyrant feeling threatened, when he senses there is somehow something he can't control. "Where is this man?" Herod demands of his servant. "He is in every place, my lord," replies the courtier, "but it is hard to find Him."^{iv}

Christ is risen and rising in our hearts every time we choose to trust God. Christ is present whenever we say "yes" to his invitation to live a cross-shaped life: in the middle of the push and pull of receiving and offering grace. "Where is this man?" Let's make it easier to find Christ. Let's plant our tree by water, so that our leaves stay green with the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Gal. 5:22-23). Let us resist the temptation to inhabit the soul killing salt lands where contempt, vitriol, hate for the "other side," and fear, run rampant. The choice is ours. Every day. Every conversation.

The one who turned water into crazy amounts of wine, empty nets into net-breaking haul of fish, is calling us today. As Sara Miles, author and activist, breaks it down for us: "Jesus calls his disciples, giving us authority to heal, and sending us out. He doesn't show us how to reliably cure a molar pregnancy. He doesn't show us how to make a blind man see, dry every tear, or even drive out all kinds of demons. But he shows us how to enter into a way of life in which the broken and sick pieces are held in love, and given meaning. In which strangers literally touch each other, and in doing so make a community spacious enough for everyone."^v

And yes, friends, he shows us how to enter into a life in which we are cool to the pizza delivery dude.

ⁱ <https://thisibelieve.org/essay/23/> (excerpts)

ⁱⁱⁱ Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*, (Harper: San Francisco, CA, 2003), 26, 31-32.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis, *Fierce Love: A Bold Path to Ferocious Courage and Rule-breaking Kindness That Can Heal the World*, (Harmony Books: New York, NY, 2021), 167-168.

^{iv} Rachel Held Evans, *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again*, (Nelson Books: Santa Rosa, CA, 2018), 157-158.

^v Sara Miles, *Jesus Freak: Feeding, Healing, Raising the Dead*, (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA, 2010), 105.