

Jeremiah 31:31-34

31:31 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

31:32 It 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.

31:33 But 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.

31:34 No 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.

John 12:20-33

12:20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.

12:21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

12:22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

12:23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

12:24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

12:25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

12:26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

12:27 "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.

12:28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

12:29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him."

12:30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.

12:31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.

12:32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

12:33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Proclamation of the Word

Have you ever fallen in love?

Really fallen...head over heels...losing all sense of time ...and the other person is all you can think about kind of falling in love. You daydream about seeing him again or possibly bumping into her in the halls. In 11th grade Chemistry class Mr. Guerry kept me after class one day. Mr. Guerry was a member of my church as well as my Chemistry teacher. He was also one of those men who was a stand-in dad for me in some ways. And this was one of those times. He asked what was going on. My grades were lower than usual. He said I looked like I was in another world instead of being focused on my Chemistry problems. I was shocked. Then he asked the zinger question. He asked if some boy had taken my heart.

He was right. I was "in love" or at least 11th grade in love. Matthew- the team pitcher for the Baseball team at my rival high school. A good church going boy, smart, good-looking, even sang in the High school Chorus. I was silly in love. I had lost all sense of reality. It happens.

Falling in love is like that.

Author John Green writes a falling in love story about Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters in the book, *The Fault in our Stars*, a popular Young Adult novel and movie. My daughter Hallie is keeping me current with all the Young Adult Literature. Hazel Grace and Augustus are two teenagers with cancer who meet at a youth cancer support group. The group meets at a Lutheran church in a room with a latch-hooked rug depicting the heart of Jesus, a symbol used by the Lutheran church. The group leader reminds them as he prays that they meet "in the literal heart of Jesus." Sounds a bit depressing, a book about kids with cancer, but Green does not allow us to be sentimental. He is brutally honest about suffering, death, and loss, but also about joy, life, and the greatest gift, love. Augustus sometimes places a cigarette in his mouth and never lights it. His reason he says, "It's a metaphor; you place the killing thing right between your teeth, but you don't give it the power to do it's killing thing." People with cancer know they are vulnerable. Love makes us all vulnerable.

C.S. Lewis Quote from his book, *Four Loves*ⁱⁱ:

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable."

Isn't it interesting then that God chooses love. Through covenant with Abraham, Sarah, and through Moses, God chooses a people to love, and at times, God's children break God's heart. The book of Hosea even describes God being like a faithful husband and God's people like an unfaithful wife. God

knows the joy and disappointment of loving- for our love is sometimes hot, sometimes cold, and sometimes indifferent.

Then along comes Jeremiah to remind us that the covenant no longer is written on stone tablets, but on our hearts. God says, "I will be your God and you will be my people."

Our identity is just that - we belong to God. We confess in the Heidelberg Catechism. "My only comfort in life and in death is that I belong wholeheartedly to God." That belonging is marked by covenant commitment which is so much more than just falling in love. It means an ongoing, committed relationship. God says to Jeremiah, in essence, they will not just know about me. They will know me in a trusting relationship.

Last week we read from John 3, "For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son,...." Jesus is the way we know God the Father. In Jesus we know God, not just about God. In the gospel reading today, some Greeks, Phillip and Andrew come seeking Jesus. The Greeks are the others that Jesus spoke of when he said, "I have other sheep who know me" not just the flock of Israel. God comes to the whole world to call us all into the "literal heart of Jesus."

Jesus, fully God, fully human, takes on human suffering and reveals to us on the cross of all things, the height, depth, and width of God's love. The cross discloses the vulnerable love of God. To know the heart of God, we see the cross.

Like Augustus Waters, God takes the killing thing, suffering the depths of human pain, and does not let it have power. For God is raised to new life and offers that life to us. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is our hope.

We have a faith that demands that we do not ignore or avoid suffering. By going to the cross by choice, God tells us:

There is no pain you bear that I have not experienced, no darkness that can overshadow what I have seen. No fear that grips you that I have not known. I have been there. I am with you.

Presbyterian pastor Michael Lindvall tells about the time he and another member of his church, John, were helping a widow in his church, Helen, move out of her home. She made the gut wrenching decision to move out of her home and into a nursing home. She was giving Michael's daughter a bedroom suite. The rest of the furniture would go to the Salvation Army. She had slept in the bed all her life and had no children, so she offered it to them. It was a depressing job, emptying her life's things, each item a memory, to sell on the cheap. They loaded up John's truck, talking and working. Then something John said startled him. John was a junior high shop teacher and a Long Island Italian, blunt and not one to share anything vulnerable. He shared about the death of an infant child more than a decade earlier, long before they knew each other. John spoke of the anguish he and his wife

went through. Michael only knew them as upbeat, dogged church members who taught the junior high class that everyone else dodged. They showed up for every church clean up and were the doting parents of a son and daughter born on either side of the baby. "How did you get through it?" Michael asked. John sat down on the end of the bed looking at him. He nodded to the heavens and said, "He's been there; that's all there is to say. God's been there." Then he picked up his end of Helen's bed, and they carried it to the truck.ⁱⁱⁱ

God took the cross upon his own shoulders. Jesus went there to show the very heart of God. God's commitment to love went that far to confront the powers of death and violence.

God took the killing thing upon his own shoulders, to show that it did not have power to kill. For Jesus is raised to new life. We have no Easter, no resurrection without the cross, no new life. The cross exposes things of darkness when brought out in the light.

The cross shows us personally the God who loves us. But the cross also exposes the evil of corporate sin. Think about the powers of racism that were exposed at Selma fifty years ago when dogs were unleashed on people who were seen as 2nd class citizens because of their color. On a bridge named for a leader of the KKK, racism and fear were brought to light as millions watched the fire hoses and dogs unleashed on television. Martin Luther King knew what they were doing. He shouted,

"Let them get their dogs and let them get their hose, and we will leave them standing before their God and the world spattered with the blood and reeking with the stench of their Negro brothers." King continued, "It is necessary to bring these issues to the surface, to bring them out in the open."^{iv}

The sin of racism when brought out into the light begins to lose its power. Lent is a time of honesty, and we have to be honest about our sin. We also have to be honest about our need for God.

But If we wish to see Jesus, like those Greeks, we must be willing to look at the cross, to go to the cross, for it reveals the very heart of God. Jesus came to draw us to God.

As Richard Rohr puts it, "Jesus came not to change God's mind about us (it did not need changing!). Jesus came to change our minds about God."^v

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ⁱ John Green, *The Fault in our Stars* (New York: Dutton Books, 2012)

ⁱⁱ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Mariner Books, 1971)

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Lindvall, *Geography of God; Exploring the Christian Journey* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 38.

^{iv} Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King; Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 157

^v Richard Rohr, "Jesus: Human and Divine- Love, not atonement" from March 20, 2015