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| **The Lessons Appointed for Use on the** | http://www.lectionarypage.net/Art/Newshield.gif |
| Fifth Sunday in Lent |
| Year B RCL |

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

Psalm 51:1-13

*or* Psalm 119:9-16

**The Collect**

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.*Amen.*

**Old Testament**

**Jeremiah 31:31-34**

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. 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. 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. 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.

**The Response**

**Psalm 51:1-13**

***Miserere mei, Deus***

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; \*  
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

2 Wash me through and through from my wickedness \*  
and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions, \*  
and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against you only have I sinned \*  
and done what is evil in your sight.

5 And so you are justified when you speak \*  
and upright in your judgment.

6 Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, \*  
a sinner from my mother's womb.

7 For behold, you look for truth deep within me, \*  
and will make me understand wisdom secretly.

8 Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; \*  
wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.

9 Make me hear of joy and gladness, \*  
that the body you have broken may rejoice.

10 Hide your face from my sins \*  
and blot out all my iniquities.

11 Create in me a clean heart, O God, \*  
and renew a right spirit within me.

12 Cast me not away from your presence \*  
and take not your holy Spirit from me.

13 Give me the joy of your saving help again \*  
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

**The Epistle**

**Hebrews 5:5-10**

Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,

“You are my Son,   
today I have begotten you”;

as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,   
according to the order of Melchizedek.”

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

**The Gospel**

**John 12:20-33**

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

“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. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

I remember when my oldest child started middle school and the principal rightfully pointed out that the only other time that we change as much as we do physically in three years is our first three years of life. And depending on where we are in life, we look back 10 or 20 or 30 years and we look and probably act decidedly different.

Likewise we can look at institutions and our schools where we attended and they also look different, either just the building or the people. My elementary school building was razed and rebuilt a few years ago. We can visit our colleges when we go back for reunions and they can look very very different. In December, I met with a family and we did a graveside burial for a woman who had attended St. Patrick’s decades ago. When the family visited the church, they remembered when there were pews. I had never heard this, so didn’t even know this was a possibility.

In a much larger scale, towns and even countries change over time, and over long periods we may not experience this, but we know there are rises and falls of entire empires.

There are a few constancies to human beings— 1. we don’t like change, And ever so funny is that there is a paradox to this… the only thing constant is change. And yet, that is not true, the other constancy, I believe, is that we, the world, is accompanied by God as we go through the changes. We are accompanied by God and we are challenged.

When Jeremiah speaks and describes God writing on our hearts, this is intimate knowledge that God would have, a metaphor that God is so very close, but this is also in a sense a utopian desire because we are still very screwed up, to be that close to God seems so far away from reality and we do actually really need teaching, and we need forming too. Although this language in Jeremiah is the same sort of language that we hear in the Gospel of Luke… we hear the blood of Jesus is shed as “the new Covenant”, I would caution you to try to resist the temptation to read the Old Testament through the eyes or ears of the New Testament. Instead may I suggest that God has always been up to trying to bring us around—to all kinds of new and different ways to love and be in love with God.

God has always been wanting to write God’s words on our hearts. In some sense, this is not only utopian, but may be eschatological or something that will come only at the end times. For we know that even with a “new covenant” through Christ, we are still in need of correction, nor do we always feel that God is intimately connected with us. We *want* God’s words written on our hearts, We earnestly desire that we are God’s people and God is our God, and yet, we turn our attention away. We are forever still in need of praying Psalm 51, not just on Ash Wednesday, but today as well, and in truth every day. We do know our transgressions, and our sin is ever before us.

And yet, as much as Jeremiah and the Psalms give us utopian words for that which we desire strongly, And we read in Hebrews that we are led by the great high priest Jesus, the main thing that we need to do to truly embrace Christ, is to change. We are in fact a new creation through Christ and it is Jesus, the one we profess to want to follow who minces no words and tells us that if you want to follow him, you have to change. There is a deadness that is with us, that does not fully embrace life. If we are to embrace life, whether we is a single person, a family, a school, a church, a city, etc. whatever the group is, then life the single grain of wheat, that which is not needed, that impedes growth, that part needs to die. And the part that most needs to die, is our indifference to the sufferings of others. Christianity is rooted in service, to care for those more vulnerable, to those in need. And instead we are cloaked in indifference, just as the outer part of the seed. It protects us, it protects us from seeing another’s pain. As an example, on an individual level, if you don’t make eye contact with the poor then you don’t see them— the pregnant woman at the intersection with her sign telling you she has two other hungry children at home, while you wait for the light to turn. Maybe you decide the man with the limp doesn’t really have a limp or you saw him limping with the other leg the other day. Still he is the one out there walking, he isn’t behind the wheel of the car with his coat and the heat on. His jacket looks pretty light, pretty thin. She looks pretty gaunt around her face, whether or not she should be having a baby.

To that end, it’s not just about doing what Jesus has told us to do. It’s not just about the outer part of a kernel of wheat dying so that the seed sprouts. “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” This is about proper ordering of our lives. Putting God first in the world is about eternal life. Grasping at things that one thinks are important but which are not God—-this is how to lose your life on many levels. Christianity is about giving away your life, your stuff, your time, in order that someone else does not suffer. It’s about a change, a very necessary change, by which …

God’s words may be written on our hearts and our sins may be washed through and our indifference may die.