

Heart to Heart

Jeremiah 31:31-34 and John 12:20-36

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Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It 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. ³³But 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. ³⁴No 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 12:20-36

²⁰⁻²¹There were some Greeks in town who had come up to worship at the Feast. They approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee: "Sir, we want to see Jesus. Can you help us?"

²²⁻²³Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip together told Jesus. Jesus answered, "Time's up. The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

²⁴⁻²⁵"Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal.

²⁶"If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you'll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment's notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me.

²⁷⁻²⁸"Right now I am storm-tossed. And what am I going to say? 'Father, get me out of this'? No, this is why I came in the first place. I'll say, 'Father, put your glory on display.'"

A voice came out of the sky: "I have glorified it, and I'll glorify it again."

²⁹The listening crowd said, "Thunder!" Others said, "An angel spoke to him!"

³⁰⁻³³Jesus said, "The voice didn't come for me but for you. At this moment the world is in crisis. Now Satan, the ruler of this world, will be thrown out. And I, as I am lifted up from the earth, will attract everyone to me and gather them around me." He put it this way to show how he was going to be put to death.

³⁴Voices from the crowd answered, "We heard from God's Law that the Messiah lasts forever. How can it be necessary, as you put it, that the Son of Man 'be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

³⁵⁻³⁶Jesus said, "For a brief time still, the light is among you. Walk by the light you have so darkness doesn't destroy you. If you walk in darkness, you don't know where you're going. As you have the light, believe in the light. Then the light will be within you, and shining through your lives. You'll be children of light."



“Namaste.” This is a Sanskrit word that means something akin to: “The light within me honors the light within you.” It is said with a bow and is meant to be a sign of great respect. The only thing I can think of that is similar in the western tradition is our passing of the peace, when we say: “Peace be with you.”

When I hear this greeting of “Namaste” I associate its reference to “light” as meaning the “light of God” or the “holiness of God.” Therefore, it means, “The holiness of God within me greets or honors the holiness of God within you.” This perspective helps me move my thinking about holiness away from ethics, away from “doing things” that make me or anyone else holy, toward an attitude of spiritual community and equality. I am no closer to God than you. You are no closer to God than I. We are all as close as our breath, as our heart beat.

Our mothers and fathers of faith, those who lived in the time of Jeremiah, would never have heard of the word, Namaste. They would have heard of the Law, the Torah, that body of words which described God’s liberating action and protective guidance in their own faith-family history. They would recognize the Holy in the telling of the story of the Exodus, how God did marvelous things in order they should be free. These words of meaning would have been recited in the temple in Jerusalem by priests and other holy people.

But what happens when the Temple is destroyed, when the priests are killed or deported to Babylon along with thousands of other Jewish leaders? Where is God then? And Jeremiah tells them:

³³But 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. ³⁴No 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.

And the people recognized the Holiness of God in a new way; an intimate way; an incarnate way. God’s law, God’s very Spirit, is within us, engraved on our hearts. We do not need to earn it, work for it, search for it. God’s way for us is with us now, right where we are.

Fast forward to the first century of the Common Era. The Christian communities are spreading outside of Jerusalem, around the Roman Empire. The story of the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, is being shared, told from person to person, family to family, community to community. The story crosses barriers of class, race, gender, and ethnicity. It is a story of intimacy and incarnation. God’s Spirit, in the person of Jesus, is alive, even though Jesus, the person, died on a cross. The vision of God that Jesus experienced and shared by his words and his life, that vision is alive and available to all, not matter who they are or where they are on life’s journey.

When asked about things like the Messianic prophecies, Jesus answered by telling stories. He talked about a grain of wheat, how it will not change if it is left alone. It will gather dust. But if it is put into the soil, buried, then it will die to its self and grow in new ways. This is resurrection, not only for Jesus, but for all. He talked about light and advised people to trust in the light, saying that folks will be able then to walk in the light and be children of light.

Nineteen years ago this month, on March 24, 1980, in a little chapel in El Salvador, the Archbishop Oscar Romero was gunned down by unknown assassins while officiating at Mass, saying the words of the Eucharist, the great thanksgiving for God's grace. Archbishop Romero was once seen to be a safe choice for archbishop in a country run by a rightwing military. Then something changed him. He witnessed the brutal killing of one of his priests and some lay people for speaking out for the rights of the poor. Then Romero became a prophet for the poor, making weekly radio broadcasts denouncing the government's oppression. It was only a matter of time before he was killed. His words of support for the least of these in a climate of oppression put him on a collision course that is similar to what happened to Jesus. In a memorial service for Archbishop Romero these words, written by another Catholic bishop, were lifted up in his memory:

It helps, now and then, to step back
and take the long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of
the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about:
We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

The good news is that God has come to us in Jesus. God has said "Namaste" to us. God has placed within our hearts God's own heart, each of us, no matter who we are or where we are on life's journey. The place and occasion of this gift was around a cross, a gruesome type of human violence. God knows what it means to suffer this kind of death. God was with Jesus. God is with us. The agony of the cross is not the means by which we know the love of God, but it is a testimony, a witness, to how much God loves us. There is no place in human experience, no depth, no width, no atrocity, no betrayal, where God will abandon us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. From God's heart to our heart.

Amen.