

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
Proper 28 Year C
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The Rev. Grayce O'Neill Rowe

From an old Hasidic tale: A disciple asks the rabbi, "Why does Torah tell us to place these words upon your hearts? Why does it not tell us to place these holy words in our hearts?" The rabbi answers, "It is because as we are, our hearts are closed, and we cannot place the holy words in our hearts. So we place them on top of our hearts. And there they stay until, one day, the heart breaks and the words fall in."

Our collect today, the prayer at the beginning of the service, the prayer that collects the themes of today's scripture readings into one thought: "Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life."

O God, let our hearts be broken, broken open so that your Word may live within us.

Luke wrote his Gospel, the Gospel that we just heard, Luke wrote this Gospel as most scholars now agree, sometime after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, the total destruction that took place in the year 70 of the Common Era. The temple, the center of Jewish life, of Jewish religion, the core of Jewish hope had been totally destroyed by the Romans; not one stone left upon another. The people were devastated. Their hearts were broken. And Luke wrote these words that we heard today, words that were spoken to a people in the midst of turmoil, in the midst of heartache. They were not words looking to a future time, they were not predicting the end times, the apocalypse; these words were speaking to what had already happened. And Jesus, through Luke the writer, was telling his people, Luke's people, people whose hearts had been broken, broken open, Jesus was telling his people that he would be with them, that God would protect them; that they had reason to hope for God would take this destruction, this ending and God would make of it a new beginning. God would provide life, blessings; that as the people lived through this devastation, they would gain their souls. Luke's Gospel tells us over and over again, that life always follows death.

As our hearts are broken, broken open, the words of our faith, the words of scripture fall in and offer us hope and life.

Let me remind you that the lessons, the Gospel that we just heard today, these were not chosen because of the unrest in our country, the unrest in our world. Let me remind you that in the Episcopal Church we follow a lectionary (a schedule of lessons that has been in place for at least as long as we have used the 1979 Book of Common Prayer) and so the lessons that we heard today, no matter how timely they happen to be, the lessons that we heard today will be read every three years on the Sunday between November 13 and November 19. If I had been able to choose the lessons for today, with this particular Sunday that has been designated as our Stewardship Ingathering, I would have chosen different lessons. But these are the lessons that have been assigned for today and they clearly speak to our world this day, November 13, 2016.

These days, approaching the end of the year 2016, these days are not very much different from when Luke penned his Gospel. Our news is filled, our lives are filled with stories of war; stories of economic hardship; threats beyond our belief of enemies wanting to destroy us, terrorist plots; our news is filled, our lives are filled with a presidential election that has revealed for us the tremendous, the painful divide that exists within our country, within our community, within our families. For some, these days, the religion and social mores that they grew up with seem to be shattered. There are some who wonder just what the church stands for anymore. I have heard people say that they just don't recognize their church as they see long held beliefs being held up and challenged by people they respect. Some of our children are taking their own lives; others suffer the humiliation of being bullied; others find nothing wrong with being the bullies. We live in a time when our hearts are broken.

And Jesus comes to tell us again that as our hearts are broken, broken open, that we are to let them be filled with the good news of scripture, the words of scripture that tell us that death is never the end; the deeply meaningful words that tell us that no matter how bad it gets, no matter how frightened you are, no matter how dark your life seems, the words of our faith tell us that Jesus comes to live among us again and again to offer us a way through. I'm not certain how it happens, this gift of Jesus, this mystery of hope, but I know, and I expect that many of you already know, that the darkest day is never totally dark, that the

greatest fear can be made manageable when we let Jesus come in, when we place our trust in God.

That never means that we sit back and do nothing for as God's children we are to be the incarnation, the enfleshment, the embodiment of God's hope and love and promise. That means that we are to offer hope when the news of our world promises doom and gloom; that we are to listen to those who are fearful of the changes in the church and that we are to listen to those who believe that God is calling us to a new way to understand scripture and that together we are to find a way forward; it means that we are to hear the voices of people on both sides of the great political divide and we are to find ways to bring healing, ways to stop the fear. If you are happy with the results of the presidential election, then you must work to protect the rights of every person. If you are not happy with the results of the presidential election, then you must work to protect the rights and ease the fears of those who are at risk in our country. Our faith tells us that we are to do all that we can do to stop the bullying especially if that means taking a good look at how we live our own lives.

A good way to start is to be reminded of and to restate the vows that we made, or were made for us, at our baptisms. Let's do that by turning to Page 304 in the Book of Common Prayer and together reaffirm our Baptismal Covenant. Since the Baptismal Covenant begins with the words of our creed which we will state together in just a few minutes, let us begin our reaffirmation of our Baptismal Promises with the words that begin towards the bottom of page 304:

Celebrant: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

I will, with God's help.

People:

Celebrant: Will you proclaim by word and (even more importantly by the example of your life, will you proclaim) the Good News of God in Christ?

I will, with God's help.

People:

Celebrant: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor (no matter who that neighbor is - loving your neighbor) as yourself?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People: I will, with God's help.

Today and every day, let your hearts be broken, broken open and let them be filled with the promise of life, life lived now, today, in the glorious splendor of God's kingdom. Don't give in to fear; don't give up; don't be fearful of change; trust that God is in our midst loving us and calling us always to new life, to new beginnings.