

“Write This Story on My Heart”

Reformation Sunday
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton

Sunday, October 25, 2009
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-36

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I don't possess a personal digital assistant (you know, a Palm Pilot or Blackberry or iPod Touch or any other type of PDA currently available). It's not something I need in my life right now, although I know many of you find such handheld wireless devices quite useful. You keep track of your tasks for the day, check and respond to e-mails, and so on. I think the technology is fascinating, and I'm constantly amazed at how the technology constantly changes. But a PDA is just not necessary right now for my day-to-day activities. I admit I love my calendar made of paper, and take pencil and eraser to it gladly. Do you want to know the best way for me to remember something? Sticky notes. Lots and lots of sticky notes, many of which I attach to my microwave oven. That's my PDA. That's how I keep track of **my** “Things To Do.” All these sticky notes in varying hues adhering to my microwave. Works for me!

But there are drawbacks. The bytes of memory available are directly proportional to the amount of space available on the outside of my microwave, not including the air vents. Only so many sticky notes can be stuck there. And some notes stick better than others. Occasionally they fall off, ending up underneath the microwave, on the floor, or in the cat's dish. Some “Things To Do” are forgotten in the process, and just never get done.

But don't we humans **always** seem to have limitations on what we can remember? No matter what ingenious technique we devise? That's the problem Jeremiah notes in our Old Testament lesson. All the laws that God's people were supposed to obey as part of the covenant God made with them, all their “Things To Do” (or not do, as the case may be) from the 10 Commandments on, were **hard** to do **all** the time, in **every** situation, **no matter what else** was going on in their lives. Sometimes people just forgot those laws, forgot how to obey God. Sometimes people didn't forget, but in their stubbornness chose not to obey. So God's people, in their less-than-perfect nature, broke the laws of the covenant: They worshiped other gods. They coveted their neighbors' possessions. They were unfaithful in their marriages. They stole what didn't belong to them. They spoke falsely about others. It was as if God's laws, these faithful behaviors his people were supposed to remember and do, were written down on little sticky notes that kept on falling off God's people. They could recite the laws, recite them very well for all to hear—and yet because these laws were not part of their inner being, were not ingrained in them, these laws didn't stick. It was not second nature for them to live the way God intended. The Law was on their lips, not in their hearts where it would take root and transform them into faithful people of God.

Yet for all of Jeremiah's words in the many chapters that precede today's lesson—words which tell us of the lack of faithfulness in Israel—today's scripture is unusually hopeful. Not that Jeremiah was saying the people of God would eventually figure out a way to get their act together. Nope. Jeremiah says, rather, that **God** will figure out a way to make a new covenant that will be kept by his people. And not simply easier laws to follow. The Ten Commandments still hold. But God will find a way to make both the knowledge of the Law and the desire to

obey **stick**. The imagery Jeremiah uses is that God will write his law on the people's hearts. Can't fall off or get lost or be forgotten, no matter what. With the covenant of God so ingrained in the people they will all know God, and all follow God. But wait, there's more (it sounds like an infomercial here!)—**God himself will choose to forget something**. God will forget his people's disobedience, their wrongful deeds. God will forgive his people. As if God will make certain the sticky note detailing his people's sins will fall to the floor and go unremembered by God.

Jesus is the way God finds to do this. His Son is the one who both knows the Law and desires to obey the Law. Those things stick with Jesus, because God realized they wouldn't stick with us. Jesus is that new covenant, making known to God's people everything we need to know about God. And then Jesus teaches us everything we need to know about being the people of God, about being human the way God intended us to be. Sometimes I think it's not so much "What Would Jesus Do?" but (to paraphrase theologian Dallas Willard) "**What Should I Do, So That I Live My Life the Way Jesus Would Live My Life If He Were I?**" Of course, that's too many letters to fit on a bracelet. But you get the point.

The point is, because of Jesus, we've been given a brand new human life to lead in this world. We are forgiven, accepted into God's family, empowered by the Holy Spirit—and God intends those things to stick. So we have nothing to lose—except our fear that we might fail, except our fear of an angry, vengeful God, except our fear that how we live won't make a bit of difference in our world. **Those** fears are the kind of things we **should** lose—let **those** sticky notes just fall away.

Now, while Jesus has fulfilled the new covenant through his own life and ministry, the reality is the new covenant hasn't quite filtered down into our beings. Maybe it's invisible ink written on our hearts, but we continue to struggle to remember our "Things To Do" as God's people; we continue to be surprised (or not-so-surprised) when sin rears its ugly head in our own words and deeds. Turns out you and I need to hear—regularly—our Lord's teaching, and receive—regularly—his meal of forgiveness. But I take heart in God's promise through Jeremiah that at last, sometime in our future, he will transform us for his kingdom. And I thank God when I see a precious glimpse of that transformation shining through you.

Lydia Raschka was helping out during the semi-annual church clean-up day in her congregation. Everyone had tasks—wiping down wooden pews, polishing communion ware, vacuuming deep into the corners of each church room. Even a four-year-old girl was helping. Her father had placed a rag in her hand, so she began to polish the altar. Apparently the little girl was at her task for a long time, so intent on it she barely looked up. When at last she finished, she had polished only one small spot. Raschka figured it was about $\frac{1}{16}$ th of the entire altar. But, she noted, "...that one small section of the altar gleamed." Raschka considered this and mused that maybe you and I are to tend and nurture the small corners where we are. Tend and nurture them faithfully, responsibly, all the while asking God to help us remember what his Son teaches us, and all the while using the gifts God so generously gives us. We are called to ask ourselves this question: "**What Should I Do, So That I Live My Life the Way Jesus Would Live My Life If He Were I?**" And then we are called to take his love and life, and make that one small corner gleam. **AMEN.**

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