

LENT 5 HEART THEME
JEREMIAH 31: 31-34; JOHN 12: 22-30
March 18, 2018

*Tell the story first...about a time when my heart was beating as fast as it had beat before
preaching as a student in Scotland
Preaching is a HUGE privilege and responsibility in the Presbyterian tradition
The beadle, the winding stairs, the pulpit high up
The beadle locks you in and the unspoken message is
“and don't come down 'til you've preached the Word”
So I go into the “Presbyterian crouch” during the hymn just before the sermon
And carved into the wood on the pulpit where only the preacher can see it
Are these words.*

This text is sort of like the night sky.
When you look up, and the night is clear, and there isn't much light pollution confusing your retinae,
You see amazing things.

At first, you see what you've been taught you'll see: the Big Dipper, Orion, and so on,
but if you keep looking, the empty spaces, the holes between the worn paths your eye usually travels, in
those empty spaces appear lots of other things. Galaxies, whole worlds, there in what we thought were
gaps and emptiness.

And then, sometimes it hits you -
I don't know how to say this exactly, but our place in all of that – you look up at it all, so empty and so
full...
(and who really gets to say what is a hole anyway, what is a gap and what is meant to be....it all
depends on what we've been taught to see...)
connecting the dots in the sky or in our own lives....
connecting the holes and the solid places;
until they make a whole (no pun intended but...)
as meaningful as our longing hearts and restless spirits will allow...

and then comes the day when it dawns on us:
as a character in the book *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* says:

*“People say Orion is called Orion because Orion was a hunter and the constellation looks like
a hunter with a club and bow and arrow, but that is silly because it's just stars, and you could join up
the dots in any way you wanted and you could make it look like a lady with an umbrella or the
coffeemaker or like a dinosaur”.*

The way we put together the holes and solid spaces
the way we connect the dots
This is the terrifying and glorious power of creatures made in the image of God. We have to power to
create worlds.

So we've been doing that, you and I , through this Lenten season.
Connecting the dots like children intent on getting it right.

Concentrating with brows furrowed and tongues protruding
fists grasping the crayon as we look for the dot that looks like it comes next.

The sky has been our canvas and our companion. And where some have seen light refracted, we have seen a covenant with all the world.

Where some have seen clouds of gaseous masses
we have seen a promise of abiding presence.

Where some have heard thunder from the mountain,
we have heard the sweet, sweet law of loving God and neighbour.

Where some have seen creatures of death and destruction,
we have seen a creature of wisdom and choices, and healing.

Where some see a man on a Roman cross defeated and alone
we see the heart of the universe beating out the meaning of life.

We connect the dots.

As it turns out, the sky is not only full of sights for our creating eyes,
but sounds as well.

And it was always so: from the moment of his birth the sky has echoed what our own hearts had begun to glimpse.

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace”

And at his baptism, the voice from above again

“This is my beloved child”

And at the transfiguration

“This is my beloved child – listen to him”.

Now here again: even John reports a voice. Here. Not at his birth, nor at his baptism, nor at the transfiguration, but here.

(read vs 27)

It is remarkable that at the moment he needed it most, the sky was empty of both sound and light. At his crucifixion, silence, and darkness. The very fabric of the universe torn in two. The heart of the world aches and then breaks.....emptiness filled with nothing – nothing but him.

The skies, both full and empty, whole and ripped apart, have been our Lenten companions until now.

What about the readings for today? What have they to add to the horizon? And what do YOU make of this?

All through John's gospel Jesus has been saying

“My hour has not yet come”.

Here – finally – he says the hour HAS come. Prompted by what?

It looks to me as though it's what comes just before.

READ 20-24

How do you connect THOSE dots?

What about that request leads him to say his hour has come?

I don't honestly know, but at the very least John the author connects them.

I want to just leave that hanging for a bit – lower our eyes and look around

Not at the holes in the sky; the spaces between the stars,

but at the empty spaces in our community and at our table.

Jesus came to draw all people all things to himself

to make it clear that the whole creation beats with one heart

a heart bent toward life and love

engraved on every beating heart is the longing for, the inclination toward, the hardwiring for love and life.

This is the Gospel.

We naturally lean into love. It's on God's hard drive. And ours. This is the gospel. It's engraved on our hearts.

There were some who believed that the Gospel was only for certain people; it was a huge issue in the early church – is the Gospel only for the Jews?

Here are the Greeks....non Jews, pagans, heathen, whatever word you want to use to make a separation between their hearts and ours....

Here are hungry seekers from distant lands – maybe the children of the magi – wouldn't THAT be something???

here they are.

Sir – we want to see Jesus

For the rest of our time this morning I want to turn our eyes away from the skies: turn them down, and out. Tune our ears not to the voices and the silence from heaven, but to voices that sound very much like these: with a foreign accent

Sir, we want to see Jesus

When we look around our gathering

When we look at our own table

there are empty spaces. Lots of them.

Fewer and fewer people attend and support churches, and this is not just a phase. Decline is steady and rapid. So is denial. It is not a question of whether the church as we know it will die – it is a question of when and how.

Like the seed (verse 24)
will there be, can there be a rising?

Absolutely. If we of all people who are known by the sign of the cross...dying and rising...if we don't know and trust this truth.....

Will there be a rising? Yes. Yes.

But the seed has to die.

And somehow – somehow this rising will be linked...somehow the key is these voices.

Sir, we want to see Jesus.

These are voices we've not heard before. They are not our own voices – these are voices we don't know how to handle.

Look at Philip – he doesn't know what to do – what to say – should he let them in? What if some people didn't like it and left in a huff?

He goes to Andrew and together they go to see Jesus.

And typically, Jesus gives, not a direct answer but this:

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.

There are empty spaces in our pews, empty chairs at our table, and so the body of Christ is wounded, the heart of the gospel is broken, we are incomplete.

Who is missing?

Are there people whose voices we are hearing – just beginning to hear perhaps who are saying “We want to see Jesus”? Whose voices are coming from outside,

or whose voices have been unheard so long they have stopped asking, convinced that no answer worth knowing can come from us?

I've said before and I'll say again – people are hungry – hungry for meaning. For community. For a sense of purpose. It's not that people are not interested, not spiritual, not open and seeking. People are hardwired for deep down things; things of the heart. For God. Hungry for God.

Written, engraved, deep on the human heart is the law of God – the law of love. All creation at its heart – at the level of atom and molecule as well as galaxy and constellation – all creation is hardwired for the holy. We don't have to convince people of that. We have to not get in the way of it, and help them to name it

give them a safe place and a loving family. A people with whom to grow into the fullness of that for which they were created; that for which they long.

Good soil in which to die and grow into life again.

That's who we are at our best, in our deepest beings. That's what we have to offer – this is our pearl of great price and nothing on earth can be more important, more fulfilling, more needful than that.

We have a God-shaped hole inside us
and a void among us - it is part of being human

But we also have, engraved into our very flesh, into our beings *the image of God*.

Human beings are at once full of the image of God and hunger for the holy.

Who is it who is saying “Sir...we want to see Jesus”?
Who in your life is asking?

These Greeks went to Philip because he was from a Greek area. Andrew is a Greek name too. These two men are uniquely placed to hear those voices.
YOU too are uniquely placed....because of the people only you know. Because of the place you live or work, the interests you have,
you have access to people we simply don't have in the same way.

Who are they? What would be your response if someone said to you “I need God in my life – YOU go to church – what do I do?”

Philip didn't know....was it ok to say yes to them? What would the others think? He went for reinforcements. Andrew. They huddle. They go to Jesus.
Are the disciples ready to accept these new and different people? What would have to change?

Jesus in his response, invites them, and us, to a life of dying to rise again. If we want to truly be his followers we will need to adjust our eyes to see the holes, the gaps, the empty spaces in our community, hear the voices asking to be let in.... and follow him there.