

Lent 5B, Saint John's Olney, 18 March 2018
The Reverend Henry P McQueen
Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ps

S.D.G.

It seemed like a simple request, I had received a package from Amazon that was not meant for me. It was addressed to me, it was delivered to my house, but it was not mine. It was not a gift from anyone, it wasn't a promo item, nor was it anything I wanted, needed, or could even use; and I wanted to tell Amazon about this. In their contact emails there is no drop down option for "the package is not mine", and there is no phone # to call to explain what happened. I simply wanted to talk to someone, it seemed like a simple request.

In John's Gospel the Greeks wanted to see Jesus, it seemed like a simple request. But there were gate keepers and bureaucracy; Philip heard the request and told Andrew, they conferred and then Philip and Andrew told Jesus, who responds that "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

Throughout His ministry people have wanted to see Jesus, great crowds and individuals. The request from the Greeks was the same, yet different. The Greeks in this passage of John come not solely as people from Greece, but as representatives of the whole world. Their presence was a sign that Jesus' ministry had just moved beyond the Jews of the region that were following him and now encompassed the gentiles and the whole world. Their presence is a sign to Jesus that it was now time to go to Jerusalem to be glorified.

For those of us of a certain age we learned our math skills using specific techniques full of memorization and repetition, the goal was to get a specific correct answer. Then it was time to help our children or grandchildren with their homework, and long division was no longer long division. Working with fractions seemed different. 2 plus 2 still equals 4, but new math and old math share few similarities; the new goal become understanding the math so that it could be applied throughout life, while still getting the correct answer. I quickly realized that helping my son with math was not going to be helpful. The math was the same but different.

Our intrepid parishioners who are reading the Bible in a year have just completed the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. They have read over and over again about God's covenant with God's people. They have read about the Law being bound on their hand and forehead. To this day, devout Jews pray with symbols of the Law physically bound to their hand and forehead; this is a very tactile reminder that God's Law should always be on our minds and in our actions.

And like old math and new math, the old covenant and the new covenant are the same yet different. Jeremiah tells us that the Lord said "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts"; no longer will the Law be on the peoples' mind and hand, now it will be on their hearts, now it will be on our hearts.

Fred Craddock was a New Testament professor, a pastor, and a noted preacher; about the new covenant he said: *"What then is new about the new covenant? That God initiates the covenant, that God forgives sins, and that Israel will 'know' God intimately had been features of older covenants. What is without precedent is the law written on the heart, the covenant at the core of one's being. The newness is a special gift, the capacity to be faithful and obedient. In the Old Testament, the heart is the seat of the will...; consequently, the special gift here is a will with the capacity to be faithful. God thus promises to change the people from the inside out, to give them a center. This covenant will overcome the conflict between knowing and wanting one thing and doing another. In the new covenant the people will act as if they are owned by God without even reflecting upon it."*

The law will be written on our hearts, the core of our being. As Craddock said, we will act as if we are owned by God without even noticing. Craddock continued: *"Which laws then, are written on the heart? All the laws of Moses? Just the Decalogue? The answer is all of these things, and none of them. Just these words will suffice: 'I am yours, and you are mine.' says God. That is the language of love and faithfulness."*

The language of love and faithfulness, 'I am yours and you are mine'. Jesus has been trying to tell us how to fulfill that, and Jesus has been telling the disciples how He would fulfill that. Like a single grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies, it will bear much fruit.

Most people know that there are specific seasons for gardens. There is a time to plant, a time to weed and water, a time to harvest. But devout gardeners know that there is another season, there is a season to read the new seed catalogues. Gardeners will spend hours reading through catalogues looking at photos of ideal specimens and reading descriptions to see if they have just the right soil and sun exposure for that specific plant, and what zone that plant thrives in. All of these questions are pondered carefully as stacks of dog eared and post-it notes filled seed and plant catalogues are read and reread. It takes time and discernment to find the plants that will flourish. It seems so simple to dig a hole and fill it with seeds, or root stock, and in a few months enjoy the growth of a flourishing new plant; but gardeners will tell you it is anything but simple.

It seemed like a simple request, the Greeks were worshiping at the festival and they wanted to see Jesus. Jesus who in a short time would go to Jerusalem where he would be both revered and reviled. Jesus who would be beaten and hung on a cross. Jesus, who would loose his life so that all could live. Jesus who would give us a new covenant that is written on our hearts. Jesus whose life said "I am yours, and you are mine." It seems like a simple request.

Amen,