***“Hearts and Mouths”*** by Stephen Finlan at The First Church, 3-10-19

**Deuteronomy 26:5–8; 30:6, 14**

5A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. 6When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, 7we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. 8The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. . . .

30:6The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live. . . . 14The word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

**Romans 10:8–13**

8“The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is the word of faith that we proclaim) 9because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” 12For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

We come as pilgrims seeking God, but we can rest assured that God sought us first. Let’s look into the Bible passages.

The story of Israel’s hard labor in Egypt, and of God’s rescuing them from that land, is the basic salvation story that Jews heard. It was as familiar to them as the stories about Jesus are familiar to us. So the only unexpected part of the Deuteronomy passage is the unusual saying that Israel’s ancestor was a wandering Aramean.

The author is compressing many centuries of history into a single sentence, and the Aramean ancestor is probably Abraham. The Arameans are a large grouping of northwest Semitic peoples, including Hebrews, Syrians, Phoenicians, and other ethnic groups. Lumping the Jewish ancestry together with these other Arameans is apparently aimed at humbling the audience, telling them they’re descended from Gentiles, while also stressing how lucky they are to have been rescued by God. In return, they should circumcise their hearts, that is, dedicate themselves to God’s teaching, to loving God wholeheartedly, and listening for his teaching, which is never far away. It’s in their hearts and in their mouths.

Now, about this word of God in the heart—do we hear it by intuition? Is it an indwelling spirit that speaks truth deep within us? Or is it in our heart because we have *learned* it, as the Jews learned the basics about the covenant, and therefore knew it by heart and could recite it with their mouths, and as Christians know that “Jesus is Lord” because they have been taught that? Is it intuition or learning? How did people in *any* age, even before Pentecost, know any truth about God? Is there a spirit within a human being that whispers truth within one’s mind?

There are some Old Testament verses that reinforce such an idea. In the Book of Job, the character Elihu says “it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives understanding” (Job 32:8 New Century Version). In Proverbs, we read “The human spirit is the lamp of the Lord” (Prov 20:27 NRSV). So each person has a lamp or a spirit from God. Then if we hear something, and it rings true to us, it may be because that inward spirit is responding positively to it. “Deep calls to deep,” says Psalm 42:7. Something deep within us responds to truth, when we hear it.

Or is what rings true something we have *learned*? Did the message about God delivering Israel ring true to the Jews because they had learned that? And does “Jesus is Lord” ring true to us because we have heard it and accepted it?

What is the word in our heart and in our mouth? Can you think of times in your life when you have quietly thought, “that sounds true, that rings true to me”? Was it an inward spirit that prompted that response from you, or was it taken in from the environment of teaching?

What about your feeling for Jesus? Is it a response that comes from deep within you, or is it something you learned, and took to heart? Well, doesn’t the answer have to be “it is both”? And the two interact with each other. What you feel in your heart gets critiqued by what you learn in life. But also, what you learn or hear is subject to review by the strong flame of feeling in your heart. Intuition and learning critique each other. That is how our beliefs become either clearer or deeper over time.

And, of course, the “word in the heart” means more than just the *message*. It points toward an actual spiritual *essence*. If that essence is rooted in your heart, other people can usually recognize it; they can *sense* your authenticity. But you don’t get your authenticity or your direction from them. You develop it in your own life, as your intuition and learning interact, and sharpen each other. “Heart and soul” refers to your intuition and learning. Again, “heart and soul” refers to your instincts and experience, and thus, to your *whole self*.

If you are seeking God with all your heart and soul, then you *are* loving God with your whole self. You may not be gushing with feeling constantly; that’s not what love is. Love is a commitment. If you are honestly inviting God into your mind and heart, you are already loving God.

And when you seek to hear the voice of God, you *are* calling “on the name of the Lord,” and you are “saved” (Rom 10:13), as Paul says. “God will circumcise your heart . . . so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 30:6). And, by the way, what you feel in your heart will resonate with what you are learning in life.