

Trinity 12, 2018

Tables of the Heart

2 Corinthians 3:4-9

St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, Or

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“And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward:” our reading begins. It seems a strange place to start a reading. What trust is the Apostle Paul talking about? I think it important to have the background of the previous three verses in order to see where the Apostle Paul is coming from as pertains to the rest of the reading for today. So, here again is Paul:

“Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men. Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:1-3). *“And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward.”*

These are great words of scripture especially for those who feel unworthy or inadequate in the edification of our Lord to the world. Knowing that we are to be living examples of Christ in us can have an overwhelming impact on our confidence to bear the truth of God. We find ourselves, at times, afraid of being judged and at other times insecure by our lack of knowledge. We become afraid to step out in faith with the Gospel truth.

But Paul says we are to be the epistles of Christ...letters to the world proclaiming the Good News. If you find yourselves worried that you cannot live up to such a calling, let me comfort you with a thought that you may not have considered before. The mere fact that you are concerned with living properly for Christ and spend your time in prayer, study, and meditation is a clear indication that the word of God written in your heart is proclaiming everything God requires of you! You don't have to be the brightest historian or even a scholar of theology.

In these three verses Paul is telling the Corinthians that they are, each one of them, epistles of Christ/letters of the living God, sent out into the world, known by their faith and through their actions. They are what they claim to be...the children of God, neither by ink nor by tables of stone but by the very penetration of the Holy Spirit into the fleshy tables of their hearts. They, as are we, are the walking and talking word of God living by the utterance of the Holy Spirit. *“And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward”* Paul says.

And now are we able to grasp what Paul is telling us in our scripture reading today. We are to trust in the gifts given us in the manner and depth that they have been given. Not to expect more, but to be trustworthy and reliable with what we have been given. *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”* It is empowering for us to understand that it is the working of God through us by which the Gospel is spread and taught according to the gifts that have been given.

We are new creatures, not under the law, not under tablets of stone, but of the Spirit where there is life in Christ, where the Word of God is written on our hearts.

“But if the ministration of death, Paul continues, written and engraven in stones, (the Ten Commandments) was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?”

In other words, If being in the presence of God manifested God’s glory as he opens our eyes to sin through the giving of the Law, how much more glorious will it be to behold Him as we approach the throne in the glory of the Holy Spirit? Through the law, righteousness was not attainable. Before the law mankind walked unknowingly in sinful paths, not knowing of sins destructive power. But it was the tablets of stone that made mankind aware of his path, the glory of which was our acknowledgement and understanding of sin, allowing us to turn and repent.

Once we act on the call of the Holy Spirit and accept Christ into our hearts the spirit removes the necessity of the law. We can now truly repent and take on the righteousness of God and bear witness to the truth. The power to live righteously is not found in the law. The only purpose of the law is to expose sin so that we may see our transgressions and repent whereby the grace of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit enlightens us to faith...a faith that leads to action.

And so, we have become the children of God and epistles to the world witnessing the Incarnation, Resurrection and Ascension of our risen Lord. The truth is evidenced by our faith and actions as the transcripts of our hearts are opened to the world. We are called to share what we are given. There is no need to walk in fear but to stand bold with the gifts you have to share no matter how little you make think of your ability. Trust God...he made all of creation after all and he is able to lead your hearts.

As you come to the Holy Table remember that the body and blood you partake of today is a partaking of his death **and** of his resurrection. All must die, but those who die in Christ Jesus are also of his resurrection. I will end with these comfortable words from St. John:

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:1-3).

Continue to make ready your hearts as the Lord moves in your lives. Page by page, chapter by chapter you are part of God's story, not in tablets of stone but in tablets of the heart, leading to everlasting life.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.