

**THE BODY OF CHRIST: CHANGED WITHIN; JER. 31: 31-34, JOHN 12: 20-33;
LENT V, MARCH 22, 2015; THOMAS H. YORTY; WPC**

What would it take to write something on your heart? Some truth perhaps that you'd heard and knew to be credible but had not yet absorbed into your consciousness and being?

I knew, as a teenager, that it was a good thing to be on time but that knowledge hadn't yet seeped into my conduct; then I spent one summer with my aunt and uncle in Vermont and had that truth about being on time written on my heart.

My uncle graciously bought me a summer pass to the local field club where tennis, golf, swimming and other people my age could be found. I made good use of the membership and spent most of my days there between the golf course and the porch of the modest clubhouse eating cheeseburgers between rounds.

One day, I was on the last hole, late in the afternoon, in fact a few minutes past the time when I was supposed to be at dinner, washed and in clean clothes with my formal, but generous, loving aunt and uncle both of whom I adored.

My uncle was 6'4", came from England, started and ran a successful company in New York and spoke with a commanding British accent. I had never seen him really upset until that day on the golf course. He had given me fair warning, told me when I arrived in early July that I was not a guest but that he would treat me like a son, just as he raised his two sons when they were living at home with privileges and expectations.

My cousins are never late for anything, after that day I realized where they learned this admirable trait. Dinner was at 6pm; at 6:15 as I was making my club selection on the 18th fairway, I noticed a car that looked like my uncle's driving down the road that paralleled the fairway; it came to a sudden stop; a large man who looked much like my uncle got out of the car, fortunately, I was at the far end of the fairway; he stood up, it *was* my uncle! towering over the car; he did not say a word but pointed like an angry Zeus toward home where dinner was waiting.

I picked up my ball, ran to my bike, sped home, slipped in the back door, splashed my face and washed my hands; but he met me in the kitchen as I tried to sneak into the dining room; my aunt was already at the table; he told me, in a calm, controlled, almost soft voice that I would never be late for dinner again; it was impolite and inconsiderate to my aunt, he said, who had worked hard to prepare dinner.

I got the point; it was written on my heart; I was never late again for dinner or for anything else that summer; when I told this story to my cousins they laughed and told me about employees who were late for meetings when their dad was owner and CEO of the company. You got off easy they said.

What does it take to write something on your heart? It takes a vested interest, knowing you have something to lose.

People choose to confess their faith or join a church because something is written on their hearts; some truth about life has seeped into their awareness and they know, in their bones, that if they ignore that truth they have much to lose.

What they've discovered is a power greater than themselves; something bigger than all of us which is the cause for certain operating principles at the heart of the cosmos that ring true and are at work in the world, things like: love is greater than hate; hope is stronger than despair; justice, even if denied or delayed, wins in the end.

This past Thursday at the Community Seder at Temple Beth Zion we were telling the story of the exodus, singing the Dayeinu which means in Hebrew, "it would have been enough." The refrain "it would have been enough" follows each step of the exodus – the dividing of the sea, the crossing of dry land, being sustained forty years in the wilderness finding manna and water, being given the Law, led out of the wilderness, and ushered into the Promised Land. As we were singing, I noticed our table was directly below the enlarged banner-sized front page of the *Buffalo Evening News* from October 16, 1961 hanging on the wall; it had pictures of the Temple in flames and stories telling how the congregation was responding in faith and confidence that God would lead them through this wilderness, step by step, to a new beginning just like God led the people out of Pharaoh's subjugation.

When something is written on your heart it is not a guarantee, it's a promise; the biblical stories and hearts of the people at TBZ reminded them of God's promise to guide and protect them; inspire them to face adversity; build with vision and continue their witness as the largest Reform synagogue in WNY.

God's care, providence and justice was written on the hearts of the leaders and members of that synagogue in 1961 when their synagogue burned down.

It's when we have something on the line; when we can choose or not to trust God that God writes truth and wisdom into our hearts.

Struggle and crisis provide the ink of experience, our trust is the pen, God picks up the pen and writes in the language of faith.

I suspect that if we created a spiritual story corps and gave our personal testimonies when we were in some exodus from bondage under a life-negating master; my hunch is we'd hear how God has written on the hearts of most everyone here today.

These are the stories, if we share them, that inspire and embolden a congregation; which is, of course, the point of NPR's Story Corps.

But there is that *pivotal moment* in today's Gospel when God wrote on the heart of humanity in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Even the Greeks, in today's reading, are being drawn to him, asking where they can find him. It's counter-intuitive but what is drawing the world, what they are all about to witness, is his death – that's what he meant by "his hour." It was his moment to enter again his desert, to face his wilderness in utter obedience and trust that God would ultimately upend the powers that plague humanity.

By calling Jesus your Lord and Savior today you are repeating a theological formula that goes back to the Apostle's Creed when some groups were saying he was a good teacher but not the Son of God. It was by recognizing when his hour had come, rather than running from it, that forced a final showdown between the worst that evil had to offer and the best God had to offer.

Had he avoided his hour that defining moment would never have taken place and the principalities and powers that plotted and carried out his death would not have been exposed and defeated.

Everything was on the line. God stood to lose a beloved son. The disciples stood to lose a man who had taught and demonstrated what it means to give your life away to find it; the people stood to lose a teacher who understood back breaking poverty and gave them hope despite political overlords and empty religion. And then, as unexpectedly as he came he was arrested and condemned to death.

But something happened between that dark Friday and the strange, unpredictable Sunday morning when his followers started encountering him again.

Independent reports confirmed that he was unmistakably alive. Slowly they began to realize the old regime hadn't really been able to erase this good man from history; then they discovered it was as if the things he taught them were written on their hearts.

Since that day so long ago, people still drawn to him find that when they put their trust in him in some crisis of health or relationship or career they discover a new way being in the world. Life ebbs and flows, sometimes we forget the truths written on our hearts which is why we need each other – the church – to remind us that finding God is really no more complicated than remembering what is written on our hearts when we call him Lord and Savior. Amen.