

Look Inward
Jeremiah 31:31-34
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
March 17, 2024
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

In a recent conversation, a question about whether or not faith impacts how we live, day to day, was discussed. The most common answer among those in the conversation was no...their faith does not have an impact on how they think about things from kindness and generosity to their relationship with creation or their positions on different issues.

Perhaps it won't surprise you to know that I was surprised by that answer.

The explanations given were things like, "It's more important to be a good person. It doesn't have to be connected to faith" or "When I choose to act kindly or when I volunteer, I don't stop and think about God or my faith."

In the weeks since that conversation, I have found myself wrestling with this question in relation to our Lenten theme.

Now, I'll be the first one to say that you don't have to be a Christian to make a difference in the world or to do good or to share love. In fact, we can likely all point to Christians who don't do any of that very well. *And* we likely all know people of other faiths or of no faith who we would put on our short list of being the best humans we know...people who, in the language of our Lenten theme, we might say embody the love of God so clearly.

Meanwhile, I wonder about this question for those of us who do claim to be Christians. What is our faith about?

Is faith simply a claim we make in order to earn a "get-into-heaven-free" card? I think it's much more than that for most of you, at least I hear you articulating it as more.

Is faith simply about "me & Jesus" - a relationship that is all about feeling okay about ourselves, not just our eternal selves, but knowing that there is abundant love and forgiveness to fall back on even when we don't think we deserve it?

Is faith about what we claim to believe? Is it about religious practices and participation?

Is being a Christian less about faith and more about finding a community of people to belong to? Is Christianity really actually about the church and the community we find there?

Is our faith something we have? Is it something we do? Is it something that we engage at will, when we choose to do so or when it is convenient for us?

Does our faith change who we are at the core?

Mark read our scripture today from the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a prophet living in the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the years leading up to Judah's fall. To position this on a timeline, his work was happening about 600 years before the birth of Jesus.

As with so many other prophets, he was focused on calling people back to God. This wasn't about obedience to random laws. This wasn't about the practice of right rituals. But Jeremiah was calling people into relationships so deep that they would be changed by them.

We heard Mark read these words earlier, *"I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another or say to each other, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD"* (Jeremiah 31:33-34, NRSVUE).

Jeremiah was calling people to a faith that was so deeply rooted in them that it was part of them.

And, contrary to what too many Christians have taught, Jeremiah was not speaking to the future coming of Jesus. While many of us choose to call ourselves Christian because it is in Jesus that we see God's love most clearly embodied, it is not only an oversimplification but it is unfaithful to the text to say that this was a prophecy about Jesus. Jeremiah did not envision a world where Christians superseded the Jewish people as God's chosen ones. Rather Jeremiah envisioned a world where people were so

open to the presence of God that their very essence became one with God and their lives couldn't help but reflect that.

So, what would it mean for us to have God's law written on our hearts? And again, let's look beyond how we hear the word law. This doesn't just mean that we would memorize the list of God's dos and don'ts. Rather, both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures remind us that all law comes down to two things - love God and love your neighbor.

Friends, this is what God desires...to be rooted so deeply within us, and us in God, that who we are is a reflection of who God is...that how we live is a reflection of God's desire for a world of wholeness and abundant life for all people.

When we embody the love of God fully - mind, body, heart, soul - then the essence of who we are becomes so deeply connected with who God is that we cannot help but reflect God's love.

I hear this passage from Jeremiah and I can't help but look inward, seek to find those words already written inside me, because there we will discover what it means to embody God. Amen.