

SERMON – “What Do We Believe in our Hearts? – Feb 21- Lent 1  
Text: Romans 10: 8b-13, Luke 4:1-13

Today is the First Sunday of Lent, a time when we purposefully journey into the paschal mystery. Meaning it is a time we will purposefully delve in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ to experience transformation. This year we will call our Lenten journey the Journey of the Heart. We have here a heart here along with the cross to remind us of this Lenten journey and to help us experience the growth in our faith as Christians. The first Sunday we start at the beginning in asking the question: What do we believe in our hearts regarding Jesus Christ? To begin a journey we have to know where we start from and then at the end of the journey we can see how far we have grown in our faith. So let's begin our journey.

There is no better way for us to know what we believe in our hearts than when a person asks us what we believe. Nothing tests us more in what we believe deep within ourselves than when we are tested through temptation or through life's trials. And nothing can help us more about what we believe than the scriptures. But I find that scriptures are largely ignored. Deemed as ancient writings, not really relevant for today; or too hard to understand; or admired only as a literary piece of art. But within these pages we have our faith story. Our belief in Jesus Christ is proclaimed throughout these pages, in the Old and New Testament. When we spend time reading, studying, and reflecting on the scriptures our faith is nurtured within us. How much time do you spend reading, studying, and reflecting on the scriptures? If you are like most people the answer is I try but I just don't understand what I am reading. Or the book puts me to

sleep. Or I just don't seem to have the time with caring for my family, work, and doing others interests. But, my friends, knowing the Bible is essential to growing the Christian faith within our hearts.

So today I am going to use Paul's letter to the Romans to help us begin our journey deeper into our faith. These are a few verses but they have been the source of many Christians to beat it in that all you have to do to be saved is confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. So I would like us to go deeper into what these verses truly mean to discover what we believe in our hearts.

First, within these 5 verses three of them are quotes from the Old Testament: vs. 8 – Deut. 30:14; vs. 11- Isaiah 28:16; vs. 13 – Joel 2:32. Paul being steeped in the Scriptures believes, as we do in the reformed tradition, that Jesus Christ didn't just come along out of the blue. No Jesus is proclaimed through out scripture and is the fulfillment of the divine story of God and God's people. From the beginning Jesus Christ has been present and is part of God's plan to make right humanities relationship with God. I will not go into the depth of each of these passage, for that would really push most all of you over the edge regarding time for the sermon. But the point that Paul is making is if you know scripture your faith is revealed at a deeper level.

Jesus illustrates this point as well when in the wilderness experiencing temptations of self-preservation, political power, and the easy spectacular way, he used Scripture to keep him on track. He even knew when scripture was manipulated by Satan and could counter with correct quotations. Knowing scripture is essential in

growing our faith and sticking to it when times get hard, or when we risk leaving our when we are challenged.

I want to challenge all of you to be involved in some kind of Bible study and if you don't; have a study group then come to our Wednesday night study at 7:00 pm. Come and grow deeper in your faith through scripture.

One lesson of our faith that we learn from scripture is that sin separates from God, each other, and within ourselves. But we try to deny sin, we try to play down our sin. In scripture we learn of this human nature through Adam and Eve when they chose to listen to the serpent and eat the forbidden fruit. We, humans, still chose again and again to sin, which changes our relationship, God and each other.

So what are we to do? Paul speaks to this by using the wording "saves us." What to ask when I hear this wording is, "Saving us from what?" Saving us from disasters, cancer, and financial ruin? No. What Jesus saves us from with his life, death, and resurrection is sin. Sin is within all of us. Let me read to you the litany of confession used at Ash Wednesday to see the scope of sin.

Leader: We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength.  
We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven.

Leader: We have not listened to your call to serve as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

Leader: We confess to you, O God, all our past unfaithfulness: The pride, hypocrisy, and impatience in our lives.

Leader: Our self-indulgent appetites and ways and our exploitation of other people,

Leader: Our anger at our own frustration and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,

Leader: Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work,

Leader: Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is in us.

Leader: For our neglect of human need and suffering and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,.

Leader: For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,

Leader: For our waste and pollution of your creation and our lack of concern for those who come after us,

We need help from these ways. We cannot defeat sin on our own. Jesus Christ is the only way. Just ask any person dealing with addictions ( their sin). The only way they can deal with and live healthy in spite of addiction, is through a high power, for us Christians, that is Jesus Christ. When we pray the Lord's prayer, have you ever noticed that it is a prayer of surrender to that higher power. Well it is.

Paul is asking the congregation then in Rome and us today, what we believe in our heart about Jesus Christ? To answer that we have to understand what do the Hebrews mean by "in our hearts" since it is coming from the Old Testament, the Hebrew culture. The heart is the center of physical, mental, emotional health. The heart is where one feels the closeness of God. The heart is the place where one decides on what will to follow. The heart is the place where God planted seeds and where faith grew.

As you open your heart to God's Word, scripture, through study, prayer, reflection, you will know more about what you believe in the core of your being. You will know in your heart God's love for humanity through Jesus Christ. You will know in your heart the core of our faith that Jesus Christ lived, died, and was risen from the grave (the resurrection) for, so that we might have life and have it abundantly. During Lent let us lengthen the time we spend in scripture, meditation, and prayer. Let the seed of faith grow within our hearts.