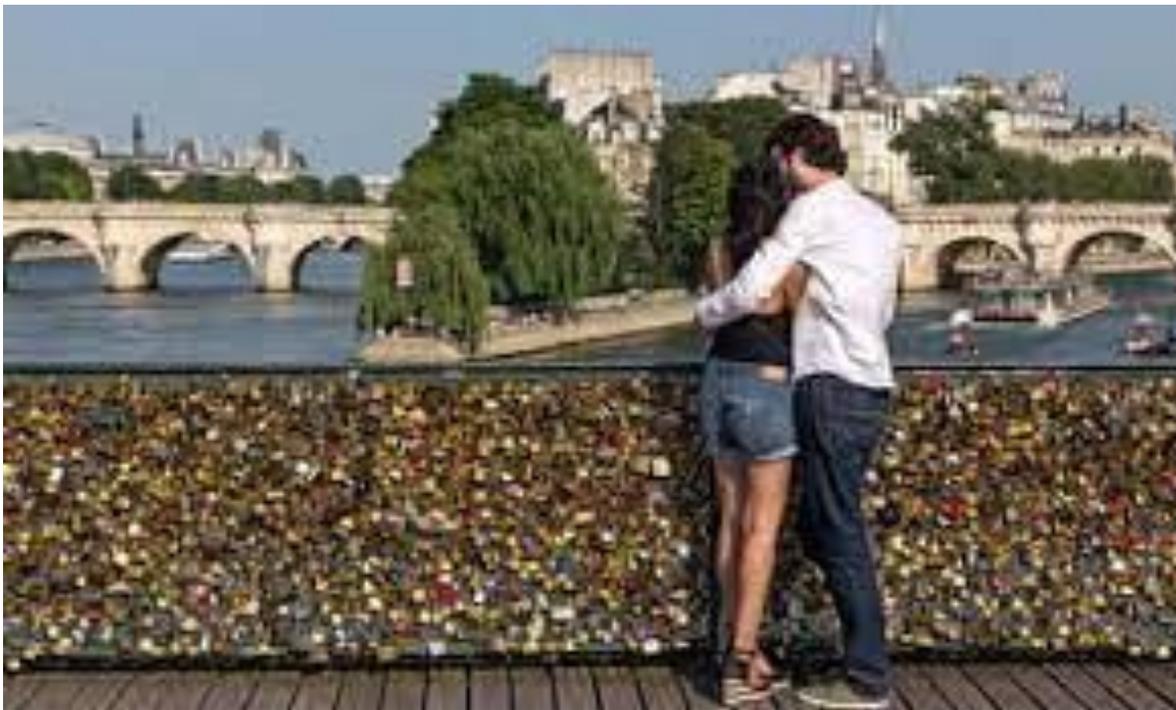


March 21, 2021 ~ 5th Sunday in Lent ~ The days are surely coming!

Through the written word and through the spoken word may we know your living word our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is a bridge in Paris that crosses the Seine River and it is called the Pont des Arts. Every year, thousands of couples attach a lock to the metal sides of the bridge and then they throw the key into the Seine River. The lock signifies their love. It is a visible symbol of their eternal love. Now we don't know what is going on their hearts, do we? Is their love written on their hearts and the lock is a symbol of that love? Perhaps the strength of the lock doesn't support the strength of their feelings for each other. Perhaps their true love for each in their hearts is 100 times stronger than the symbol of the lock. The truth is we don't know. The truth is that only God can see into our hearts and only God knows our deepest thoughts and feelings.



The prophet Jeremiah knew this about humanity, that people can yield to temptation and turn away from God. God had established a covenant with Noah, with Abraham and with Moses. The promises of the covenant was that the people were to be faithful to God and God would bless them and they would be his chosen people. However, the people kept turning away from God and were seduced by the temptations of the world.

The Hebrews had the 10 Commandments written on 2 stone tablets and ordained by God. The people needed to be taught the 10 Commandments and encouraged to bring them into their daily thoughts and actions. We know this moral code thousands of years later and we continue to stray from them.

During a time of war and persecution during the 6th century BC, Jeremiah had a dream. He was living in wartime in Jerusalem. The Babylonians had taken control of Jerusalem and destroyed the temple build by King Solomon hundreds of years earlier. As we continue into the second year of the pandemic, we also dream.

Jeremiah begins his sharing of his dream with these words;

The days are surely coming says the Lord.... (Jeremiah 31:31)

You and I say the same thing.... The days are surely coming when we can hug our grandchildren, invite friends into our homes, travel to a warm place during the winter months, go out to a restaurant. The days are surely coming...

The most recent edition of Thunder Bay's Bayview Magazine which came in Saturday's newspaper had an article about what people wish to do post-pandemic. Here's the first things that people intend to do:

- Hug
- Shake hands
- Go to church
- Travel, especially to see family
- Go to a concert, a movie, or a restaurant

The days are surely coming...

Jeremiah goes on say this. The Lord is going to make a new covenant but this will be a different covenant. Instead of the promises and laws of God being external and written down on tablets, this new covenant will be written directly on people's hearts.

I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they will be my people.
Jeremiah 31:33

No longer will people need to be taught the laws of God and speak about them. Everyone will know the Lord and everyone will be transformed. The laws of God will be part of our DNA.

What a beautiful statement. To write something on our hearts means that it is inside of us and permanent and to be treasured. Now when Jeremiah wrote these words, he believed as everyone did in the 6th century BC that the heart was the place in our bodies where we thought. It was thought to be our brains. That is where we get the saying "I have learned it by heart." Meaning that we have memorized something and stored it. We know today that this memory is stored in our brains in our heads, and not in our hearts.

I treasure the meaning of Jeremiah's prophecy and that he uses the word heart. When something is written on our hearts, we combine it with love. The heart is known today

as the place in our bodies where we feel and understand love. When we say, I love you, we draw hearts and we make the shape of a heart with our hands. I would often say this to my children when they will little; I love you and point to my eyes, my heart, and then to the child.

When something is written on our hearts such as compassion, faith, the presence and knowledge of God, grace, kindness, and empathy they then become instinctual. They don't have to be taught. These attributes are who we are. What a vision for the world!!

A recent true story that happened near Ottawa has captured my attention. A young woman named Haley was out walking her dog on a leash. All of a sudden, the woman collapses and starts to have a grand mal seizure. The leash of the dog is still held in her hand. A car goes by. The dog vigorously pulls the leash out of Haley's hand and then backs up into the middle of the road to stop a car. All this is recorded on a neighbour's outdoor camera. The dog literally stops in front of the car so that the car on the road has to stop or run the dog over.

On the video, you can see that the dog's actions are very intentional. The dog is named Clover and is only 1 and a half years old. The driver of the van stops, gets out, runs over to the woman with Clover standing by and then the man gets help. The woman is unconscious and only wakes up in the ambulance. Haley is fine and so is Clover. That love and care for Haley is written on Clover's heart. He was not trained to do this. Haley's mother went to the store and brought home 2 steaks. Haley's Dad got excited and said, "Good news. We are going to celebrate with steak!" Haley's Mom said, "No, these steaks are just for Clover."

As Christians, as disciples of Jesus, we pray that God's law of grace, God's law of love, will be written directly on our hearts.

Jesus said this;

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." John 15:13

There isn't a parent or grandparent listening who would not lay down their life for their child or for their grandchildren. And they would do it without thinking. Because that law is written directly on their hearts.

There is a woman connected with this parish who gave one of her kidneys to her close friend. No relation. A friend.

In our gospel for this morning from John 12, the 5th Sunday in Lent, Jesus reminds us that we must be willing to follow Jesus wherever he goes. And that includes walking with him into the passion story, the story of his crucifixion and his death. We must be willing to die to whatever is stopping us from following Jesus. Unless you and I are willing to become like the grain of wheat which must be covered and go into the ground and die,

we will never bear the fruit of God's love. This is what it means to have God's love written directly on our hearts.

We have only 2 weeks left in Lent, just one week until Palm Sunday, one week until Holy Week begins, and just 2 weeks before we celebrate the resurrection. Let us use this time to move God's law from outside into our hearts. Let this be the PICC line of our salvation, of the covenant between God and all of God's people.

The days are surely coming says the Lord.

I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.