



We Are Forgiven

Jeremiah 31:31–34

“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord.

“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

March 22, 2015

Thoughts for the Week

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 36: 14-16, 19-13, Ephesians 2: 4-10, John 3: 14-21

It has been a long time since the words of a song came back to mind but the moment I remembered it I had to go to YouTube immediately and play it again as though for the first time: The song is “Ode to Billie Joe” sung by Bobbie Gentry. It is the fictional (I think) story of Billie Joe McAllister who, it is said, jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge to his death. Another suicide, another determined effort to go home, perhaps for the last time.

A side bar on the story is the conversation of the family around the dinner table when they hear of Billie Joe’s death: “Well Billie never did have a lick of sense, pass the black eyed peas.” Another family member says: “I’ll have another piece of apple pie.” The mother remarks: “How come you’ll aren’t eating anything? I worked all morning.” Well, just another suicide, who will remember it next week? As Bobbie Gentry herself once said in an interview: “There’s an unconscious cruelty afoot.”

In this story and in the scriptures, I find several interesting ideas. A recent religious columnist, Ted Wolgamot, pointed out that 40,000 Americans die of suicide every year, one every 13 minutes and yet Americans simply shrug.

A second thought comes from the title of a book by the novelist, Thomas Wolfe: *You can’t Go Home Again*. I have often thought about that title because I too have often longed to go home again. The problem, of course, is that I don’t know where to go and, besides, home probably does not exist any more. Nonetheless, I long to go there because that’s home for me and I’m sure they won’t turn me away.

The thought comes to me that we are eternally pointed toward home; we have no other option because that is where we came from. Throughout every person’s life, no matter how far or how widely we travel, there is still the deep-set longing to go home, at least one more time because it is there that we find some sort of ending, some sort of fulfillment.

Sadly enough, that may be what a person intent on suicide is reflecting on: the thought that in a world that does not much care, there is no home to go to any more; therefore I shall go home to the God who first called me into life. This is all conjecture, of course but going home finally is what we long for.

Interestingly (or perhaps by design) the scriptures speak of the hunger to return to where we truly belong. The first lesson is taken from the Book of Chronicles that speaks of the exile of the Jewish nation in Babylonia. They had no hope of ever returning to the Land of Israel and Jerusalem. Besides, Jerusalem and its sacred temple lay in ruins. Then one day the political scene changed dramatically. Cyrus, king of Persia overran the territory of Babylonia. His first act as the new ruler was to send the Jewish foreigners back home where they belonged. And so it was: they returned home and began to rebuild their temple, their religion and their nation all over again. A longing finally fulfilled.

In his letter to the disciples in Ephesus, Paul assures them that though they may have been separated from God through sin, they are now once more raised up with Christ and seated with him in the heavens. (Home again!)

In the Gospel of John, Jesus assures his disciples that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life.”

So, in some strange sense we are back to the place where we started. Could it not be that we, each of us, long to go home

again not to the temporary place we once knew so well but to that place which has “Eternal Home” written over the doorposts? Then we shall truly be home at last, home at last. Perhaps that is what Billie Joe McCallister was longing for when he leaped from the Tallahatchie Bridge. I sure hope so.

Happy Birthday Bob (27th) & Paul (27th)

Prayer Thought for the Week

God of all creation, we thank you for knowing us. We give thanks for the blessings of life, the gift of your loving presence, and the joy of sharing in sacred community.

We confess that we often behave in ways that are less than you created us to be and humbly ask your forgiveness. Grant us the courage and compassion to forgive others as you forgive us.

We uphold for your blessing the people of Burkina Faso. Guide and bless all who promote communities of justice and peace in all nations.

We pray for all peoples, that the spirit of justice and mutual forbearance may be established, so the spirit of love and peace will be felt.

With gratitude and hope, we pray in the precious name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Stewardship Thoughts for Lent

God gives and loves graciously and generously! We know that all we are and all we have are gifts from God. As followers of Jesus, our whole-life commitment is in response to God's wonderful generosity. Being generous is about aligning our priorities with God's priorities, aligning our hearts with God's heart.

What is our response as disciples of Jesus? In simple terms, we are called to respond with thankfulness and share with others as generously as God has shared with us. The following six spiritual practices of A Disciple's Generous Response guide us in managing and sharing our resources:

Be Generous - God gifts each person with boundless grace and unending love. Our response to that love and grace is to serve others and let generosity become part of our nature.

Be Dependable - God's unconditional love for each of us is expressed through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. When we faithfully respond to that ministry we become accountable to one another, God, and ourselves.

Manage Your Money - Managing the money we have, no matter the amount, expresses our desire to love and help God, neighbors, ourselves and the world. When we focus our giving on God's purposes, our hearts become more aligned with God's heart.

Share Joyfully - Tithing is a gift of thanksgiving to God in response to God's generous gifts to us. When we share our tithes, the church can spread joy, hope, love, and peace around the world so others can experience God's generosity, too.

Save Wisely - Saving is a way to prepare for the future. It gives us the chance to extend our love and create a better tomorrow for our families, friends, the church's mission, and the world.

Spend Carefully - Responsibly spending is a commitment to live a healthy, happy life together with God and others. The teachings of Jesus challenge us to make lifestyle choices that are often countercultural.