

A Walk with the Lord
Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Mark 12:28-30
Celebrating 25 years of ordained ministry of Rene Jensen
First Christian Church: Omaha, Nebraska
Diane Zehr

Deuteronomy: 1-9

¹ *These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you.*

⁴ *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

.....

Mark 12:28-30 (from The Message)

²⁸ *One of the religion scholars came up. Hearing the lively exchanges of question and answer and seeing how sharp Jesus was in his answers, he put in his question: "Which is most important of all the commandments?"*

²⁹⁻³¹ *Jesus said, "The first in importance is, 'Listen, Israel: The Lord your God is one; so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.' And here is the second: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' There is no other commandment that ranks with these."*

.....

Introductory remarks...

What John 3:16 is to Christianity ("*for God so loved the world that he sent his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*"),

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is to Judaism. "*Hear O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*"

These are the words of the Shema, the first words committed to memory by a Jewish child; the words that appear on the mezuzah on a Jewish doorpost; the words that appear in the phylacteries worn by the most Orthodox Jewish men on wrist and forehead. The Shema is the first two of the Ten Commandments stated in the positive. It is the central command, the primary creed, and the summary statement of the Jewish faith.

It is, also, as we hear in the Gospel for today, the answer Jesus gave when asked what the most important Commandment was. Jesus recites the Shema. Jesus grew up being an observant Jew. He recited this to God twice a day during his morning and evening prayers. It is the message of the Shema that Jesus embodied so perfectly and which offers all of us a way toward loving God completely with our whole lives.

It is God's call to the people of Israel, God's promise to be 'there for them' all the time in every place and the imperative commands that God's people should recall this, remember this, recite this, reflect this truth, this covenant.

It is the text that Rene chose to be the central text of her ordination into Christian ministry lo those many 25 years ago last May. Rene has always had a way of, shall we say, "cutting to the chase...to the heart of the matter at hand" and her selection of this reading both then and today focuses a laser beam of light on the central responsive act of gratitude and faith for every Christian... and it says a lot about how she has sought to live her life.

Since we are celebrating her ministry and her life let us lift up how she has responded to God's love for her and responded to her call to ministry. As we do that I also invite you to consider your own walk with God as you think about the many ways we are called to love our Lord.

Today we celebrate that Rene loves God with her HEART.

Remember that in the Hebrew Scriptures the "heart" was not viewed as the location of our emotions (that was usually the bowels). Rather the heart focused the organizing center of our whole being, not mere emotionalism. To be able to love God and love neighbor takes a constant, steady stream of commitment and a willingness to allow God to be the center of our lives. It means God is our first priority.

Loving God with all your heart is what gets hold of you and compels you to organize your life in such a way that all the rest of what you think and do and hope to live out is measured and centered on the relationship you have with your Lord.

We see that strong center of faith in the heart, at the heart of the matter in Rene.

RENE LOVES GOD WITH HER MIND...

(Borrowing from Leonard Sweet's sermon "LightWorks")

When a star explodes in a distant galaxy, we don't hear it. We don't feel it. We don't even see it for thousands and thousands of years. The great distance of the star means that even though the brilliance of the explosion travels at the speed of light (180,000 miles/second), it takes generations to reach even our most powerful telescopes. Only when the light finally reaches us can we acknowledge that distant star's explosive beauty. Without the continuity of the light, tirelessly, steadily traveling towards us for millennia, we might never know that it had existed at all.

Communities of faith must be able to produce light with the same intensity, tenacity and brilliance of that distant star - light that can be trusted to stay so true to its trajectory that the image it conveys is a vital, vibrant, distortion-free representation to generation after generation of the original faith community.

It was Benjamin Franklin's least known, but perhaps most important political insights: "America's destiny is not power," he argued, "but light." This is even MORE true of the church. The church's destiny is not power, but light - to be a community of light.

Rene, in this sense, we could say...has star quality. Buckminster Fuller used to say that the thoughts of the world's greatest philosophers and theologians and scientists traveled out and bumped into stars and then traveled back to us. Her gift in ministry has been her ability to notice the light that scholars and leaders of faith from thousands of years ago have sent forth to future generations and to be the telescope that finds this light as she helps to shed light...on a fine point of theology that needs a careful work of nuance so that it be understood without distortion. So many times I have struggled with an idea or way of understanding a point of faith only to have Rene come forth with a

succinct thoughtful clarifying statement that leaves me sputtering to God quietly... "Yes God...what SHE said!!!"

For many of us Rene has been the instrument that has enabled us to see and understand the light of faith that has been traveling towards us for millennia. Without her gift we might never have known it existed at all. The church reflects a brighter light and a stronger witness because of her gifts.

Rene loves God with her SOUL.

This is what sends Rene across the ocean, alongside Loch Lomond in Scotland driving way too close to the rock wall next to MY car door, on a ferry ride to the Isle of Mull where they have one lane roads and cars have to use the "pull-offs" to avoid hitting each other or the cows and sheep and goats that share that one lane highway with the cars who travel it, and travel on yet another ferry to the very tiny Isle of Iona (3 miles by 1 mile wide), a place which Gordon MacCloud says "is a Thin place' where earth and heaven are closer than most other places on Earth. Rene seeks out a close and deep relationship with her Lord. It is loving God with her soul that sends her back to live on that island for 6 weeks to live in community with others who also seek God with great depth of spirit. It is this very soul thing that will soon send her off to Spain to walk the "Camino".

One pilgrim has said this about his own experience on this journey... "you don't walk the Camino, the Camino walks you". When you are open to the deep mystery, ancient history, and spiritual forces on the Camino you are in for many surprises.

This thought of loving God with our soul sends each of us on our own life journey to build a deeper and stronger relationship with our God. And when we are living that out as individuals we are also living that out as community, as the whole people of God.

Rene loves God with all her STRENGTH.

Carrie A. Nation (1846-1911) was a 19th century temperance crusader adamantly opposed to the evils of drinking alcohol. She was also a member of the Stone-Campbell Movement (the movement that gave birth to the Churches of Christ, the Christian Church and the Disciples of Christ). In fact she was the wife of a minister of that movement. She had her own calling and her own form of ministry.

Carrie Nation was in the habit of storming into a bar, with hatchet in hand and driving out the drinkers and tearing up the place -- the tables and chairs, the bar, even the picture of the half naked lady behind the bar -- all "in the name of the Lord" (She called these events 'hatchetations'). Later a reporter asked her about such extreme behavior. She proudly reported that when she came to the Lord and was baptized, it was on the coldest day of the year. They had to saw a hole in the ice to get her into the river for baptism. "I came up out of those chilly waters a bearcat for the Lord, and have remained that way ever since!"

I recount this biographical information about Carrie Nation, a 'bearcat for the Lord' because we have come to know and love this in Rene who exhibited some of those qualities of strength along with those who joined her struggle on behalf of the church and the children of The Christian Children's Home. When Rene enjoins a battle for something she believes is good and right and true, God has a formidable ally in God's court.

Your life, Rene; indeed, each life who accepts this lifework is like all good music, art and beauty. We receive the inspiration and gifts of God and of the ancestors of faith who have passed on to us what has been given. Then it is our task and our joy to hear the whispers of God's voice and the melodies of the souls of God's children as they play their music. It is our task and our joy to be the telescope that reflects and refracts the light. God gives us the gifts and you have opened yours and used them in some imaginative, strong, wise and beautiful ways.

Rene, these words have guided and directed your life. These are the words that have been impressed upon your heart. These are the words you have lived and spoken and taught with energy, imagination, intelligence, prayer, passion and love. May the future go well for you. May you and your children and your children's children (soon to arrive) enjoy long and full lives just as the Lord has promised. Our lives and the church you love, may we say the world... are all fuller from having you in them.